

THE VOLUNTEER YOUTH LEADER AS CULTURAL TRANSLATOR

A THESIS-PROJECT

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To Jennifer.

The Lord sure knows how to make a sweetheart!

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AFLC	Association of Free Lutheran Congregations
D.Min.	Doctor of Ministry
FLY	Free Lutheran Youth



## ABSTRACT

The role of a volunteer youth leader is a biblical expression of the priesthood of all believers. This caring, believing adult has a vital voice in the lives of teenagers in a local congregation. Today's youth culture presents many voices on what a teenager should think, feel, do, and believe. Cultural translation is a significant area for effective youth ministry, which includes the volunteer youth leader building well-designed bridges. The crossroads of content from scripture and the culture of teenagers is the ground that a volunteer youth leader can build a bridge from the world to the Word.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE VOLUNTEER YOUTH LEADER & TODAY'S YOUTH CULTURE

#### Introduction

On August 1, 2007, Minneapolis area vehicles were moving around the Twin Cities' interstate system in the typical late afternoon rush hour traffic.<sup>1</sup> Bumper to bumper, people inched their way to their destinations on this summer Wednesday evening. Shortly after 6 p.m. Central Daylight Time, those moving across the Interstate 35W bridge over the Mississippi River in downtown Minneapolis encountered the nightmare of the bridge collapsing. Cars, trucks, and a school bus fell into the river and onto the layers of beams, concrete, and rocks. The destruction took the lives of 13 and injured 145 others.<sup>2</sup>

Questions arose immediately about the maintenance of our nation's bridges and on the efforts within the state of Minnesota for necessary repair.<sup>3</sup> Cries in the public were raised about the safety of any bridge. If this catastrophe could happen on a bridge connected to such a well-traveled road, then what structure was safe? The tragic irony that emerged in the days that followed was that the Interstate 35W bridge over the Mississippi River that collapsed was being

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1. Bill Salisbury and Sophie Carlson, "The Day a Bridge Collapsed in Minneapolis and Lives Changed Forever," July 29, 2017, <https://www.twincities.com/2017/07/29/the-day-a-bridge-collapsed-in-minneapolis-and-lives-changed-forever/>, online edition of St. Paul Pioneer Press, accessed June 21, 2019.

2. Salisbury and Carlson, "The Day," accessed June 21, 2019.

3. David Schaper, "10 Years After Bridge Collapse, America is Still Crumbling," August 1, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/2017/08/01/540669701/10-years-after-bridge-collapse-america-is-still-crumbling>, accessed June 21, 2019.

repaired at the time of the accident.<sup>4</sup> But after an investigation, it became clear to the National Transportation Safety Board that the cause of the collapse was not neglect or other existing challenges from its age, instead it was a “design flaw” from the beginning.<sup>5</sup>

Effective youth ministry expects building well-designed bridges and the volunteer youth leader can build a complete bridge.

To build a solid bridge, the volunteer youth leader takes careful note of the Word of God and the “world” in which teenagers live.<sup>6</sup> The volunteer youth leader has a valuable voice in this exchange. This voice can speak from the authority of God’s Word to share the truths of Scripture with teenagers. This same voice illumines God’s promises, invites the listeners to observe what God has revealed, and applies insights by the Holy Spirit into the lives of American adolescents. This method is a vital approach, but it is not the only helpful dynamic for spiritual formation.

In addition to starting with the Word and speaking into the world of teens, the volunteer youth leader has the capacity to be aware of today’s youth culture and to drive teenagers back to the lens of Scripture. This direction of communication from the world back to the Word is more than a simple redirect of teenagers’ attention. It takes an awareness of what the cultural messages are saying. More specifically, it expects both a layer of understanding of today’s youth culture and a flexible bridge to link to the timeless truths of the Holy Bible. This method is the scope of this project.

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4. Schaper, “10 Years,” accessed June 21, 2019.

5. Schaper, “10 Years,” accessed June 21, 2019.

6. John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing, 1982), 11.

What are the hurdles to volunteer youth leaders employing this method? The potential struggles are varied. A volunteer youth leader has demands on his or her time. The fixed number of hours in a week positions this individual to avoid the investment needed to identify the influences in today's youth culture. A volunteer youth leader has limitations in his or her awareness of culture. When the target is an ever-moving object like today's youth culture, one can grow weary of finding out the important factors involved when it is "a rapidly changing culture."<sup>7</sup> A volunteer youth leader has questions about how to build this bridge. What does a specific lyric in a pop song or a well-quoted line in a beloved movie for adolescents have to do with the gospel of Jesus Christ? These reasons along with many others may contribute to the volunteer youth leader limiting his or her voice or remaining silent about today's youth culture.

What if a flexible tool granted the volunteer youth leader a way to think through today's youth culture? What could be gained from a theological and practical framework for examining the trends and taking teenagers that they minister alongside of to a place of contrast between the world's message and the Word's message? Such a tool would equip the volunteer youth leader to bear Christ's light on the situation, both on what is natural and selfish as well as on what is supernatural and serving Christ. This project pursues such a tool.

### The Context of This Project

This project will examine the volunteer youth leader and today's youth culture in relationship to one specific Christian denomination in the United States. The Association of Free

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7. Walt Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture: Bridging Teen Worldviews and Christian Truth*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 11.

Lutheran Congregations (AFLC) is a national fellowship of 256 local churches.<sup>8</sup> It is common for a local AFLC congregation to be led in youth ministry efforts by a volunteer leader.<sup>9</sup> The researcher for this project has served as the National Youth Director since 2007 and is positioned to conduct surveying among those serving in a volunteer role within congregational youth ministry.

The AFLC has its theological roots in Lutheranism and pietism as well as a confessional and evangelical body.<sup>10</sup> The result can be an emphasis of confessional Lutheranism or evangelical pietism or both. For the AFLC, together they embody a welcomed tension and an observable spectrum of ministry practice. This context means that the heritage of Lutheran pietism combined with the cultural questions that come to today's American adolescent can leave a gap in communication. The tradition of pietism leads to a general tone of abstaining from culture, while the cultural texts around teenagers remain influential.<sup>11</sup> This context also means that the heritage of confessional Lutheranism stresses the two kingdoms with today's youth culture, which can indicate in a subtle way that cultural questions can be released as points of non-engagement.<sup>12</sup> The "in-but-not-of" approach from John 17 in this way stresses this world is

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8. AFLC President's Office, *The Fifty-Sixth Annual Report of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations*, (Minneapolis: AFLC, 2018), 328-332. AFLC will be the abbreviation used for the denomination.

9. AFLC Youth Ministries' Office, unpublished reports from congregational verbal and informal reports in 2018 indicate the number of congregations' youth ministry efforts led by paid youth ministry staff at 53 out of 256 or 20.7% of the congregations in 2018. The other 79.3% of congregations are led by volunteers including adults of all ages, parents of teenagers as well as non-parents, and called pastors that do not have youth ministry as an itemized area in their ministry description. This vast majority representation informs the need for this project.

10. Larry J. Walker, ed., *Standing Fast in Freedom*, (Minneapolis: Association of Free Lutheran Congregations, 2011), 4-7.

11. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1952), 45-82. Niebuhr's "Christ Against Culture" typology would best reflect this theological stance.

12. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 149-189. Niebuhr's "Christ and Culture in Paradox" typology would best reflect this theological stance. The "Christ Against Culture" and "Christ and Culture in Paradox" are adjacent on the spectrum of Niebuhr's typology. See Table 1 in chapter three.

not home, while the cultural texts once again remain persuasive. This combined heritage leaves limited expected conversations about cultural engagement. This summary explains the concerns which can be addressed by training established volunteers as cultural translators.

The volunteer youth leader has the existing relationship with the teenagers in the congregational context, or the capacity for this relationship, which can be leveraged for healthy connections leading teenagers to cultural engagement. In addition, the volunteer youth leader has the Scriptural truths to bear light on the cultural issues common to today's American adolescent. If these leaders were provided a tangible and transferable tool for cultural engagement, one that would enhance their existing efforts, then the volunteer youth leader could effectively shift from a passive voice to an active approach addressing cultural influences. In turn, it would enhance building bridges without design flaws which would impact the spiritual lives of teenagers for biblical discernment and cultural engagement.

This hypothesis assumes that the volunteer youth leader will be open to a tool for these discussions. It further anticipates that such a tool could be developed to be accessible without respect to age, gender, or experience. After the initial work of a biblical analysis on volunteer leaders in a congregational context and a literary review on culture, the methodology involved will survey volunteer youth leaders on their views of youth and culture. Next, leaders will be trained in a tool to bridge from the world back to the Word. In order to get a reasonable sense of the tool's impact, ten weeks will be provided for leaders to exercise it. At this point, a survey of this group will be conducted for their reflections on the tool and the process. Their reflections as volunteer youth leaders will assess their degree of cultural engagement change and of the tool's capacity to assist in this change. Semi-structured interviews that target the individuals with measurable changes of perspective will deepen the feedback for further evaluation on the tool.

The end result of the development, implementation, and review of a tool would be a stronger position for the volunteer youth leader to minister to the next generation of teenagers. These American adolescents in the AFLC would understand how their faith in Jesus is more consistently applied to their daily's lives in this cultural context.

### The Direction of This Project

Chapter two will focus on the biblical witness to the place of volunteer adults in the lives of the next generation. This chapter will examine a biblical theology reviewing the related passages in Scripture, a historical theology from the Church's testimony through the millennia, and a systematic theology on closely linked issues such as the priesthood of all believers and the leadership of the laity.

Within the framework of Scripture, the influence of caring, believing adults will be established in the Holy Bible through passages including Deuteronomy 6, Psalm 78, Ephesians 4, I Thessalonians 2, and I Peter 2. The Bible's consistent call is for all people who know the Lord to be "living stones" and "a holy priesthood" in the words of I Peter 2:5.<sup>13</sup> Each section will be treated briefly to glean from these truths the applications to the volunteer youth leader.

Historical theology will survey the church fathers (early, Greek, Latin, and Reformation) with an eye on the implications for the volunteer youth leader. Examining the contributions of the volunteer or lay leader throughout the centuries of the Church will expand the perspective on the volunteer youth director's capacity to bring significant contributions in this age.

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13. All Scripture citations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV), 2007, unless otherwise noted.

Systematic theological issues will complement this overview of content questions by linking the findings from biblical and historical theology. If a volunteer youth leader is a proper expression of the priesthood of all believers and can teach within the boundaries of the local congregation, then such a person is positioned to minister with teenagers. The testimony of biblical, historical, and systematic theology will address the proper perspective for the volunteer youth leader's role with teenagers.

Chapter three will take up the questions related to culture. The theology of culture, the practice of contextualization, and the application of volunteer-led youth ministry will be considered. Culture will be reviewed for its meaning in relationship to the Church. The theology of culture will draw from past and present theologians and practitioners. For example, Albert Wolters' work *Creation Regained* offers a direct summary of "central realities" for Christian thought with the terms "creation, fall, and redemption."<sup>14</sup> This language gives a structure to how a volunteer youth leader can hold a "reformational worldview" within the interaction for cultural engagement.<sup>15</sup> Links such as this one will unearth the common ground for the best summary of these expressions. The definition of culture and the theology of culture will examine the contributions of a specific spectrum of Protestant theological traditions.

The practice of contextualization will reflect on both the options of contextualization and the ways in which these options frame discussions on culture. Contextualization will introduce the need for analysis, approach, and application when looking at culture. The literature review will provide warnings against accommodating to the culture and against deliberately ignoring the

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14. Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 87.

15. Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 116.



culture. Further, the literature review will prioritize the current authorship on the question of engaging culture including the alignment of these insights for summary assessment. The language found within the literature review will produce options for a tool to be produced that organizes cultural evaluation and engagement. Such a tool would need to stress its accessibility to the world of the volunteer youth leader, being theologically informed and practically designed.

Chapter four will step forward with a tool for training a cultural translator within the American culture for AFLC volunteer youth leaders. This tool will be developed based on the biblical and literary perspectives gained. This analysis and approach informs the volunteer youth leader primarily from world to Word in the spiritual care of teenagers in their congregation. The challenges raised in the process of communicating from the Word to the world is not the scope of this research. The other direction of assessment from world bridging to the Word is in view to best enhance the volunteer leader's biblical conversations with teenagers about the culture in which they live.

After a tool is developed, a survey will be conducted of the profile adults serving as volunteer and vocational youth leaders in the AFLC during 2019. Utilizing the broader range of both volunteer and vocational youth leaders will inform if contrasts exist on engaging culture. This initial survey will also examine opinions of leaders with teenagers in the regular ministry settings and in relationship to cultural questions. The tool developed will be a move toward a common language from which the volunteer youth leader can establish communication with the teenagers in his or her immediate context. Such terminology will also be introduced within the survey instrument in order to properly assess the contributions of the tool for cultural engagement.

The survey before training will target the profile of men and women involved as volunteer youth leaders within the AFLC. A person will not need to hold a formal title of “volunteer youth leader” or “volunteer youth director” or its parallel from their congregation in order to be eligible for surveying or training. An eligible participant will be one that is not paid to meet regularly with teenagers in a Sunday morning or non-Sunday morning environment established by the local congregation. The initial survey may be completed by paid youth ministry members, in order to gain the sense of their views on the questions at hand, but their results will not determine the direction of the project.

The first survey will utilize Google Forms and be structured for 35 questions. The survey direction will begin with situational context as to whether or not the individual is a volunteer, then shift into youth ministry philosophy and cultural engagement, and finally conclude with a section on demographics. Anticipating some volunteer youth leaders will not take advantage of the Google Forms online platform, printed surveys with the identical layout and sequence will be made available the first week of July 2019, at FLY, the national youth gathering of the AFLC.<sup>16</sup> All printed forms completed by eligible adults will be included in the survey results as long as they do not represent a duplicate of the online offering.

The profile of volunteer youth leaders surveyed will cover a range of demographic ages, both genders, various lengths of time in the current congregation, and a spectrum of experience working with teenagers. Theologically trained pastors may be admitted into the study, if their congregational call does not itemize a direct responsibility for working with teenagers. Their

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16. The national youth gathering of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations is called the FLY Convention. FLY Convention® stands as an acronym for Free Lutheran Youth Convention. It assembles biennially in the summer of odd numbered years. The occasion of surveying and training will occur July 1-6, 2019 at the YMCA of the Rockies, Estes Park, Colorado. Information accessed on June 21, 2019 from [www.flyconvention.org](http://www.flyconvention.org)

election to participate in the survey will indicate a personal concern for competency in cultural engagement. Pastors in this understanding are caring, believing adults that are offering their time to be healthy influences in the lives of congregational teenagers. In some instances, the volunteer youth leader profile will also be a parent of some of the teenagers involved in the congregational setting. This dual status of leader and parent will not disqualify a person from participation in the study. The tool for cultural engagement could be utilized by parents in the home as much as by volunteer youth leaders in the congregation, but this project will remain singular in focus on the use of the tool in the church setting.

The expected timeline for the methodology is as follows: the initial surveying and training in the summer of 2019, the congregational implementation for ten weeks from summer into the early fall of 2019, and the final surveying by the end of September 2019. Semi-structured personal interviews on sampled surveys will be conducted via video conferencing or personal phone calls during fall of 2019. The guidance from these interviews will inform the research on the strengths and weaknesses of the tool that has been developed.

### The Outcomes of This Project

Survey results from the volunteer youth leaders will inform the needed evaluations on the tool as well as subsequent recommendations for future use and study. If the final surveys on application indicate effectiveness for the tool, then the volunteer youth leaders' assessment will include a measurable increase in their capacity to reflect on cultural texts with teenagers as well as to shift to a biblical response for cultural engagement. If the tool is not shown via final surveying to be effective, then a significant overhaul of language, structure, or layout may be in

order. The semi-structured interviews conducted after application surveying will illumine the strengths and weaknesses involved for improvement.

The tool will be critically reviewed for the portions that enhance the volunteer youth leader's application in their congregational context. In addition, any areas that detract from the volunteer youth leader's efforts will be revised. The trends from the surveys will address to what extent the tool could be sharpened for a bolder mark as the volunteer leader begins with the world and bridges back to the Word. The final outcome will be a refined tool for the volunteer youth leader as a cultural translator.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CONTENT & CULTURE: A BIBLICAL EXAMINATION

#### Introduction

Thursday afternoon can be an unforgiving seminar slot in a week-long conference. The enthusiasm of the beginning of the week has worn off. The hope of the finish line does not yet come into play as it appears on Friday, and of course, the pure promise of the weekend still lies ahead in the unreachable future. The challenge of Thursday afternoon remains.

The researcher was invited by the Minnesota Family Council to offer a seminar on youth culture at their *Student Statesmanship Institute*. This innovative week enables high school students to hear from leaders in the fields of government and communications, and then apply what they have heard through simulations in specific tracks of interest. The participants interested in law are rubbing shoulders with those that have stood on the state senate floor. Those intrigued by media are writing copy and shooting clips after a behind-the-scenes tour at a local television news station. The experience is impactful to observe.

Organizers of the event concluded that these growing young leaders may also benefit from thinking through the messages of today's culture that they regularly encounter. Thus, the author's invite was to provide a session to give the audience a biblical language for identifying and engaging the youth culture around them...on Thursday afternoon.

The students surprisingly jumped into the content. They were aware of what Walt Mueller calls the cultural "soup" around them.<sup>1</sup> As a group of young men and women that desired to be people of influence, they brushed aside late afternoon weariness and forged

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1. Walt Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture: Bridging Teen Worldviews and Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 112-113.

forward. During the content, they were shown a 60-second commercial from a major phone carrier that was popular during the previous Super Bowl. The message of the commercial was clear: there are no limits! Thirty minutes of training in advance of this moment provided these teenagers with a tool for cultural examination. The author then asked this room of over fifty students, “What was the message of the ad?” An attentive participant in the middle of the third row immediately said, “I’m staying with my phone provider!”<sup>2</sup>

When an audience is baptized by culture, how does that influence the process of communicating content to them? For the caring, believing Christian adult who desires to share Jesus with the emerging generation, is it enough to be well-versed in Scripture? The Bible affirms its own efficacy, but that is not the focus of the question.<sup>3</sup> The Holy Bible can change any human heart, but does the leader need to build a bridge to the listeners in order for them to hear Scripture’s content?

With these questions in mind, I Thessalonians 2:5-8 assists the people of God with a point of clarification. It explains the need for both the content and the connection:

For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.<sup>4</sup>

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2. Personal exchange at University of Northwestern, St. Paul during Minnesota Family Council’s *Student Statesmanship Institute*. St. Paul, MN on August 3, 2017.

3. Some of the passages in the Holy Bible that affirm the power, effectiveness, and nature of God’s Word to change lives are Psalm 19:7-11; Psalm 119:93; Matthew 24:35; Romans 1:16-17; II Timothy 3:14-17; and II Peter 1:16-21.

4. *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV) Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007.

Scripture expresses faithfully its own the content, including the centrality of the gospel. In this particular passage, the Apostle Paul offers a slightly different emphasis. The content of “the gospel of God” is not left secondary. It is readily acknowledged as the core truth to be expressed. What is added to the picture of communication of the gospel is the connection expected between the messenger and the ones receiving the message.<sup>5</sup>

The verses involved offer a recognition that communicating content is not at all about internal desires such as greed or glory. The passage also explains that sharing God’s truth is not primarily about leveraging one’s position of leadership as Paul could surely have done as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead, the example given is one of relationship, namely, a parallel to a maternal instinct. Connection develops between a leader and a listener through Christ-like gentleness and Christ-like compassion. Such an approach is not new, but it certainly exposes the issue that many volunteers in youth ministry find in front of them.

Vocational youth leaders have been trained through formal education and informal experience to either understand this dynamic, or at a minimum, be aware of these contributing factors. But what about the caring, believing adult volunteer? What has positioned them to understand the place of gentleness and compassion when working with their portion of God’s flock? The education and the experience of an adult prompted to take a volunteer leadership role may be readily launched by the gentle call of Jesus and the heart of the Savior King. And yet, in the perplexing world of today’s American adolescent, it can leave the volunteer scratching one’s head. If such a volunteer shifts to engage youth culture, the gentleness and compassion can be abandoned for an aggressive attack on the culture. Such an approach could leave the teenagers distant from the messenger, because the attack on the culture is the culture that they call home.

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5. I Thessalonians 2:8 points to the content (“share with you not only the gospel”) and the connection (“but also our own selves”).

On the other hand, if such a volunteer ignores the influence of the culture, the content to be communicated can be left on one side of the gap without a bridge to the teenagers within view. The challenge on this end of the spectrum parallels well-meaning missionaries in a foreign land without any knowledge of the heart language of the people. This tension must be addressed.

This chapter will identify the biblical theology, historical theology, and systematic theology that inform the crossroads of content and culture for a volunteer youth leader. The volunteer youth leader in the local congregation is an essential role for the furtherance of Christ's Kingdom and for the effective communication of God's truth within youth culture.

## **Biblical Theology**

### **An Examination of Scripture**

The starting point for any such examination is the Scriptures. Establishing the biblical basis for the topic at hand will enable the study of the doctrines involved. This section will examine four passages that directly speak to the need to communicate with youths and three passages that explain the need for discernment. Together, they form a framework for the crossroads of content and culture.

First, Deuteronomy 6:1-9 offers an important beginning. The people of God are called to recognize the primary burden for the family and for the family of God to communicate the Lord and the heart of knowing Him. It is something that they needed to listen to as God's people, and to be certain that those that follow behind them would listen to as well.<sup>6</sup>

Second, Psalm 78:1-7 continues the themes from Deuteronomy with increasing expansion. The psalm begins as a personal expression, but quickly broadens for community

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6. Deuteronomy 6:1-9. Deuteronomy 6 is the passage that Jesus famously points to when answering the question of the greatest commandment in Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-31; and Luke 10:24-28.



ownership.<sup>7</sup> Passing on the faith to the next generation becomes both the individual burden of the psalmist and the shared calling of God's people.<sup>8</sup>

Third, turning to the New Testament, the themes extend forward to the Church in Ephesians 4:1-16. The entire body of Christ is noted here as the ones offering guidance. Their impact is directed toward those that are easily tossed about spiritually by the lies of the culture. God's truth, God's love, and God's people are listed as a triangle of influencers for the grounding of those drifting. Three uses of comprehensive terms ("whole", "every", and "each") demonstrate that the body of Christ is a full-fledged participant in this process.<sup>9</sup> The importance cannot be overstated – all the body of Christ is involved.

Lastly, I Peter 2:4-10 stresses that Christians are not just simple sources of influence, but genuine shapers to pass on the faith. The terminology of "priesthood" is coupled with descriptions of "holy" and "royal" within the biblical text. Believers individually and corporately have been set apart through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as well as given standing in Christ's Kingdom.<sup>10</sup> This position provided by faith molds a believer's view of oneself in relationship to the community of faith as well as to the community of the world.

The biblical basis up to this point has prioritized connections to the priesthood of all believers. Although an overview, these four passages demonstrate the consistent theme of God's

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7. Psalm 78:1-7. Beginning in verse 3, the singular tone from the first two verses become plural.

8. Psalm 78:5-6. God's people are commanded to this priority, which continues generation after generation.

9. Ephesians 4:1-16. After the oneness of the faith and the activity of the Lord in the first section of the chapter, verses 11-16 specifically stress the roles and goals of the local congregation, which includes spiritual maturity in Christ. Verse 16 brings this focus to its apex as the three comprehensive terms are utilized in one single verse.

10. I Peter 2:4-10. This position within the priesthood is received from the work of the High Priest, Jesus Christ. Jesus as a living stone (v.4) makes believers living stones (v. 5). In the parallel way, Jesus as the High Priest has made all Christians into a priesthood that is holy (v.5) and royal (v. 9-10).

people as both redeemed by God's grace and recruited into God's work. In addition, the areas of culture and discernment have ample passages to instruct Christians in their roles and responsibilities as the children of God through faith in Jesus. Because of the intersection of these areas, the biblical basis here will be considered together. Three passages are especially useful to inform the discussion, namely, Proverbs 2:1-10, Romans 12:1-2, and Ephesians 5:1-11.

First, the second chapter of Proverbs offers one primary example of a biblical perspective for discernment. The wise sayings of Solomon call out to his own son, as well as to any reader, to pay careful attention to wisdom and understanding. The Source of this active knowledge and its application is attributed to the Lord Himself. The implication follows that people will navigate this world either with or without this critical skill of discernment.<sup>11</sup>

Second, in the epistle to the Romans, chapter twelve begins with important instructions for a believer in Jesus Christ. Christians are called to present themselves to the Lord as “a living sacrifice,” which understands both the existing position as one that has been redeemed and the continuing call as one that is being renewed.<sup>12</sup> The Apostle Paul goes on to contrast being conformed or being transformed.<sup>13</sup> The activity of being conformed has a distinct source – this world. The nature of being transformed also has tangible starting point – God's will. This transformation is described through involvement of the believer's mind, the testing process, and ultimately, the work of God Himself.<sup>14</sup> These examples direct the reader's attention to the reality

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11. Proverbs 2:1-10. Proverbs is replete with these examples, but chapter two provides a concise set of verses to show the alignment of discernment through the insight that wisdom and understanding come from the Lord.

12. Romans 12:1.

13. Romans 12:2.

14. In Romans 12:2, the verb for “be transformed” (συσχηματίζεσθε) is in the passive voice, which explains that this transforming power begins from outside of the believer. Intriguingly, the verb for “be conformed”

that content from God and culture from the world both can be formative voices. The question remains which voice will have the ears of the hearers in the body of Christ.

Third, the fifth chapter of Ephesians offers a movement from the goal of imitating God to the trap of imitating the world.<sup>15</sup> The warnings in this passage include attitudes and actions that are not “proper among saints,” that will bring “the wrath of God,” and that are “unfruitful works of darkness.”<sup>16</sup> The believer’s call is not to run and hide, but to respond to God in “thanksgiving,” to refuse to become “partners with them,” and to “expose them” for what they really are.<sup>17</sup> Engagement with the culture is expected in such a way that at the same time guards from evil and guides into what is good. These passages demonstrate the influence of culture and the needed investment in the content of God’s Word.

### Theological Areas

With the biblical basis in place, the biblical theology can be considered. Three theological areas will encapsulate the necessary framework for this topic: the theology of the priesthood of all believers, the theology of culture, and the theology of epistemology. The priesthood of all believers summarizes the position for God’s people to serve. The theology of culture points to the proper engagement for God’s people with the world around them. The theology of epistemology explains the way that God’s people know and their capacity for insight.

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(μεταμορφουῖσθε) also appears in the passive, which points to the world bringing this impact to the person. Greek New Testament references from [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org), accessed August 11, 2017.

15. Ephesians 5:1 begins with “be imitators of God,” but Paul’s attention quickly turns in verses 3 through 11 to the reader’s understanding of ways in which the world will aim to deceive the saints of God in Christ.

16. Ephesians 5:3, 6, and 11.

17. Ephesians 5:4, 7, and 11.

First, the theology of the priesthood of all believers directly speaks to the question at hand. There exists a tangible thread throughout Scripture about the position that God's people hold as priests of the Living God. The Old Testament establishes the priesthood, but foretells of a day when all of God's people would serve in this role.<sup>18</sup> The New Testament brings into light God's design for all believers to be Kingdom workers, as ones that serve Him now and in the age to come.<sup>19</sup> When it comes to the volunteer youth leader, this theology empowers the leader to know one's service in the lives of teenagers is a vocation from the One on the Heavenly Throne.

Second, the theology of culture is significant since the analysis is the crossroads of content and culture. H. Richard Niebuhr in *Christ and Culture* makes the approach abundantly clear that the believer has a calling of engagement, which acknowledges a "double movement from world to God and from God to world."<sup>20</sup> This double movement is commonly addressed in the Church by the second part, which suggests that a potential remains for the body of Christ to think through or rethink the first part. Culture is the summary of the influences within a people group and its socialization, its civilization, its achievements, and its values.<sup>21</sup> The believer's posture is one of awareness about the surrounding culture, one of recalling Scriptural truths, and one of actively gauging what is good and true for the transformation of culture.<sup>22</sup> The volunteer youth leader lives here. As a servant of Christ, the Kingdom worker relies on the Word of God. As one invited to minister to teenagers, the kingdom of this world is ever present. The engagement needed can be identified, even if the methods to engage are not immediately

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18. Isaiah 61:1-6; Jeremiah 33:19-22.

19. I Peter 2:4-10; Revelation 1:4-7.

20. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1952), 29.

21. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 32-36.

22. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 190.

intuitive to the volunteer youth leader. The next chapter will examine culture more closely including a theology of culture.

Third, epistemology offers a link between the first two theological areas. The nature of knowledge and rationality is, by definition, a philosophical discussion.<sup>23</sup> Philosophy offers points of analysis within the discipline of mental activity, but for the consideration of this topic, the person's capacity to look at knowledge by description or "propositional knowledge" is primary.<sup>24</sup> Truth exists, there is justification for that reality, and this truth can be ascertained in the human intellect. This triple combination enables the human being to know and to express what is known, but in a postmodern American nation, how do we know what we know?

Paul Hiebert explores this area in *The Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truth in a Modern/Postmodern World*. Hiebert summarizes epistemological positions with idealism, positivism, critical realism, instrumentalism, and determinism.<sup>25</sup> Taking the first and last, idealism links "reality to the mind" with the "external world being illusory" or unknowable, while determinism on the other end of the spectrum sees reality as a result of external causes so the external world is real, but equally unknowable.<sup>26</sup> In Hiebert's terms, positivism reflects that the mind can know reality and this external world "without bias."<sup>27</sup> To contrast positivism, instrumentalism (or pragmatism) acknowledges that the external world exists, but only grasps at portions that are functionally useful. Modernity employs positivism,

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23. J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 71-90.

24. Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations*, 73.

25. Paul G. Hiebert, *The Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truth in a Modern/Postmodern World*, (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity International Press, 1999), 37-38.

26. Hiebert, *Missiological Implications*, 37-38.

27. Hiebert, *Missiological Implications*, 37.

while postmodernity holds to instrumentalism.<sup>28</sup> Hiebert contends that “a way ahead” is found in critical realism since it serves as a “middle ground between positivism, with its emphasis on objective truth, and instrumentalism, with its stress on the subjective nature of human knowledge.”<sup>29</sup> Critical realism keeps the external world a reality, affirms the capacity of human knowledge, accepts the healthy element of human limitations, and evaluates the interrelationships of cultural patterns.<sup>30</sup>

Hiebert further notes that with translation seen through a “positivist” manner “to other cultures” the results “often been one of radical displacement.”<sup>31</sup> The history of Western missionaries requiring converts in the Eastern world to adopt Western culture would be one example. On the other hand, an instrumental effort would assume “all cultures are good,” which leads to “syncretistic” conclusions.<sup>32</sup> Critical realism suggests that it would be epistemologically possible to view cultures with awareness that they are “not morally neutral entities,” which enables a discerning eye on the pieces that reflect God’s good creation and those that are humanity’s evil influences.<sup>33</sup> According to Hiebert, the end assessment positions Christian congregations to be discerning biblically, theologically, and culturally, which can include an evaluation of one’s own customs.<sup>34</sup>

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28. Hiebert, *Missiological Implications*, 107.

29. Hiebert, *Missiological Implications*, 68, 69.

30. Hiebert, *Missiological Implications*, 37.

31. Hiebert, *Missiological Implications*, 111.

32. Hiebert, *Missiological Implications*, 111.

33. Hiebert, *Missiological Implications*, 111.

34. Hiebert, *Missiological Implications*, 112.

This focus on the nature of epistemology underscores the volunteer youth leader can identify knowledge, admit some partiality in perspective to the knowledge, and express this knowledge in a way reflecting cultural patterns familiar to one's hearers. Although far from a flawless expression, the theology of epistemology asserts the volunteer youth leader can express truth in an American adolescent culture. With this exploration, the volunteer youth leader is not only a priest by the gracious work of Jesus Christ, but is also one who engages within this culture because of the caring, believing adult's capacity to know truths and to express them to the intended audience.

In summary, the survey of the biblical basis and the tone of biblical theology consistently point to a volunteer youth leader's valued position, activity, and influence as given by the Lord for passing on the faith to the next generation.

## HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

The Church throughout the millennia has had much with which to interact regarding the intersection of content and culture. While not necessarily addressing the entire crossing point, each age has had its topics (or threats) to address to keep classical, biblical Christianity on track. Therefore, when the testimony of the ancient church is considered, the view may not quickly capture the entire picture. Instead, pieces of the puzzle will first come into focus, then the pieces will be put in their proper place until one clear picture will emerge.

In this section, historical theology will be examined through a survey of pertinent perspectives from the Apostolic Fathers,<sup>35</sup> the Greek Fathers,<sup>36</sup> the Latin Fathers,<sup>37</sup> and the Protestant Reformers, or for parallelism within this discussion, the Reformation “Fathers.”<sup>38</sup> The Apostolic Fathers will be reflected through the writings of Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch, which will primarily focus on the prominence of Scripture and the body of believers.<sup>39</sup> Two Greek Fathers will be considered: Justin Martyr and Irenaeus of Lyons.<sup>40</sup> These men reflect a growing awareness of church activity and the message of Jesus spreading in the ancient world as well as their interaction with the culture. Three Latin Fathers, Tertullian, Jerome, and Augustine (commonly referred to as St. Augustine), will speak to the crossroads of content and culture in their collective age.<sup>41</sup> Lastly, the Reformation Fathers, Luther and Calvin, will expand on the perspective of historical theology, especially within the realm of the priesthood of all believers.<sup>42</sup> Ultimately, this section considers the volunteer youth leader’s aptitude to express content and to identify useful interaction with the culture from within the priesthood of all believers.

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35. Johannes Quasten, *Patrology: Volume II – The Ante-Nicene Literature After Irenaeus* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, Inc., 1992), Table of Contents.

36. Quasten, *Volumes I-IV*. The researcher is borrowing heavily from Quasten’s overall timeline, but supplementing it from other included sources to create a complete sequence used for this section on historical theology.

37. Bryan M. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press/Baker Publishing, 2007), 9-10.

38. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 27.

39. Quasten, *Volume II* sequence.

40. Quasten, *Volume III* sequence.

41. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 27.

42. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 27.



## Apostolic Fathers

A question that often arises in looking back at the Church Fathers in modern discussions is the degree of faithfulness that they had to the Scriptures. Bryan Litfin indicates in *Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction* that such a suspicion is not warranted. “The truth of the matter is the church fathers loved the scriptures immensely. You cannot read the fathers without immediately noticing how the pages of their writings reverberate with scriptural quotations and themes. Scripture was in the very air they breathed; it was what nourished their souls.”<sup>43</sup> This adherence to God’s Word becomes the lens through which the Apostolic Fathers can be viewed. Two Church Fathers in this period are noteworthy when it comes to a discussion of an individual Christian’s role and the indivisible Word of God: Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch.<sup>44</sup>

These two men are among a select few that are given the title of Apostolic Fathers, because based on what is known of their lives and their writings one of two scenarios are in place: they had contact with the Twelve or they were presumed by the early church to have contact with the Apostles.<sup>45</sup>

### Clement of Rome

Clement of Rome, was a late first century church leader, who is remembered for his Epistle to the Corinthians.<sup>46</sup> James A. Kleist suggests that Clement's epistle to the Corinthians "is

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43. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 21.

44. Michael W. Holmes, editor, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations of Their Writings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 3.

45. James A. Kleist, *The Epistles of St. Clement of Rome and St. Ignatius of Antioch. Ancient Christian Writers Series* by Editors Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe (Westminster, MD: The Newman Bookshop, 1946), 3.

in reality a homily on Christian life."<sup>47</sup> When it comes to this Church Father's view of the leaders and the local congregation, according to Clement, "it is to the humble-minded that Christ belongs, not to those who exalt themselves above His flock."<sup>48</sup> Leadership is not an exercise in authority, but an application of humility learned in following Jesus Himself.

Clement has a distinct conclusion regarding the people that should be involved in Kingdom work. His appeal is for the body of believers to be active in this process. "Let us reverence the Lord Jesus Christ, whose Blood was sacrificed for us; respect our officials, honor the presbyters, subject the young to the discipline of the fear of God."<sup>49</sup> Clement places himself in this corporate description. Although he is a congregational leader, he is also an individual believer. From a youth ministry perspective, this first century Church Father is underscoring the value of training the young in the faith. For Clement this view is not a fleeting thought, "Our children must have their share of a Christian upbringing."<sup>50</sup> Such a perspective is equally valuable now in passing on the faith to the next generation.

Although Clement sees a clear distinction between the leaders and the laity,<sup>51</sup> his instruction is for each and every believer. "Let a man be a man of faith, let him be able to utter knowledge, let him be skilled in the discernment of discourses, let him be pure in his conduct."<sup>52</sup> The Church Father's concern is a brotherly love for all believers as well as a life of faith and

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46. Kleist, *Epistles*, 5-7.

47. Kleist, *Epistles*, 5.

48. Kleist, *Epistles*, 18.

49. Kleist, *Epistles*, 23.

50. Kleist, *Epistles*, 23.

51. Henry S. Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 43. Clement comments, "The layman is bound by the rules laid down for the laity."

52. Kleist, *Epistles*, 39.

service to Christ. Does Clement conclude that such Kingdom service of the laity involves only men? He writes to the Corinthians, "Many women, invested with power through the grace of God, have accomplished many a manly deed."<sup>53</sup> In this setting, Clement's perspective is that since unbelievers of both genders can sow strife with one another, then certainly both Christian men and Christian women have the capacity to build up one another through Kingdom service.

### **Ignatius of Antioch**

Ignatius of Antioch is regularly placed second on this list in relationship to Clement of Rome primarily because of the sequence of their writings.<sup>54</sup> Much of what we have from Ignatius' epistles are his addresses to local congregations.<sup>55</sup> What does this mean for the question at hand? The reader can be watchful for ways in which this Apostolic Father speaks to the body of Christ and to the position of believers to influence.

In his letter to the Ephesians, Ignatius addresses them "as my fellow disciples."<sup>56</sup> Also to the same congregation, he writes, "And thus you all are fellow travelers, God-bearers and temple-bearers, Christ-bearers and bearers of holiness, with the commandments of Jesus Christ for festal attire."<sup>57</sup> Each believer has this "temple-bearer" identity through the grace of God. In another place, Ignatius explains, "I am not giving you commands as if I were someone. For even though I am in bonds for the Name, I am not yet perfect in Jesus Christ; for now I am beginning

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53. Kleist, *Epistles*, 42.

54. Kleist, *Epistles*, 3-4.

55. Kleist, *Epistles*, 51-53.

56. Kleist, *Epistles*, 61.

57. Kleist, *Epistles*, 64.

to be a disciple.”<sup>58</sup> His language demonstrates his own view of his lack of prominence. Ignatius would rather with the Apostle Paul boast about his weakness, in order that the power of Christ may be seen in him.<sup>59</sup> As he writes to the Magnesians<sup>60</sup> and to the Romans,<sup>61</sup> the tone remains the same. Ignatius greets the church and directs his comments to the congregation with first priority. Only after this starting point is complete, then do greetings follow for the bishop and presbyters. In this way, Ignatius reflects a priority for the body of Christ.

The Apostolic Father repeatedly returns to a favorite image of the congregation as a choir or a musical instrument.<sup>62</sup> To the Romans, “You should form a choir of love and sing a song to the Father through Jesus Christ.”<sup>63</sup> With the Philadelphians, his appeal is for them toward unity “as strings are to a harp.”<sup>64</sup> The metaphor is extended to include the unity necessary for the singular song of the congregation. “Each of you must be part of this chorus so that, being harmonious in unity, receiving God's pitch in unison, you may sing with one voice through Jesus Christ to the Father.”<sup>65</sup> Finally, in his letter to the Ephesians, Ignatius shows how this musical symphony works for the congregation and the leaders:

Certain it is that your presbytery, which is a credit to his name, is a credit to God; for it harmonizes with the bishop as completely as the strings with a harp. This is why in the symphony of your concord and love the praises of Jesus Christ are sung. But you, the

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58. Jack N. Sparks, editor, *Apostolic Fathers: Modern Translation of These Early Christian Writings* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1978), 78.

59. II Corinthians 12:9-10.

60. Kleist, *Epistles*, 69.

61. Kleist, *Epistles*, 80.

62. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 43.

63. Kleist, *Epistles*, 81.

64. Kleist, *Epistles*, 85.

65. Sparks, *Apostolic Fathers*, 78.

rank and file, should also form a choir, so that, joining the symphony by your concord, and by your unity taking your key note from God, you may with one voice through Jesus Christ sing a song to the Father.<sup>66</sup>

The result is evident. Ignatius sees a single melody rising out of the contributions of the combination of the church leaders and the whole congregation. This imagery would be helpful for the local congregation to encourage the volunteer youth leader in his or her “song to be sung” among today’s teenagers as a part of the greater congregation’s chorus.

### Greek Fathers

The feature of these theologians that procures them the title “Greek” is they wrote in the Greek language. With an eye on the common Greek of Jesus’ day, these early Church Fathers wrote with a goal of aligning to the authority of the Scriptures. This method was also useful in addressing the people of their times.

### **Justin Martyr**

The first of the Greek Fathers to consider is Justin Martyr. He is remembered as “the first Christian philosopher” of church history.<sup>67</sup> With his life and example, this Church Father offers a view outside of the common list of bishops and presbyters. Justin Martyr is aligned here with the Greek Fathers because of his focus on philosophy. “He found connection points between the church’s proclamation and the thought-world into which he was taking the gospel. Yet he did so

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66. Kleist, *Epistles*, 61.

67. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 54.

without compromising the faith like the many heretical sects.”<sup>68</sup> Those invested in youth ministry can take the same method.

Was Justin against the system of bishops and presbyters? Justin comments little on it. What seems like a pressing question to our modern ears about leadership structure was not the first concern for the early Church. In *The Early Christians in their Own Words*, Eberhard Arnold suggests “in those first years, terms for leaders like ‘overseers,’ ‘presidents,’ or ‘elders,’ were not clearly defined.”<sup>69</sup> Litfin echoes, “The early Christians adapted their church structures to the needs of their day, just as we do in our own context.”<sup>70</sup> This situation may assist congregations evaluating how best to be active in youth ministry. A volunteer youth leader may be the best identified position for a particular congregation’s setting.

For Justin, the need of the day was addressing the cultural philosophy that was prevalent. He demonstrated a clear calling to this expression of sharing the message of Jesus. “Justin experienced success in his apologetic ministry because he tailored his message to his audience. Having studied all the philosophers of his era, he could speak the lingo fluently. He even wore the right kind of clothing to fit into the community he was trying to reach!”<sup>71</sup> This concept is worth considerable reflection for the volunteer youth leader seeking to communicate the content of God’s Word to the culture of this world.

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68. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 55.

69. Eberhard Arnold, *The Early Christians in their Own Words* (Famington, PA: The Plough Publishing House, 1997), 25.

70. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 47.

71. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 62-63.

Reflecting on Justin Martyr's contributions, Litfin writes, "As we often put it today, 'All truth is God's truth.'"<sup>72</sup> Justin indicated both an "open-minded eclecticism" which can have its dangers, such as Christianity being treated solely as philosophy, but the "trailblazer" also kept in his approach a high view of Scripture and an awareness of his audience, which enabled many to see the validity of Christ.<sup>73</sup> The applications for the volunteer youth leader are extremely functional for keeping God's Word in its proper place and for having a keen eye on the audience that is being engaged.

### **Irenaeus of Lyons**

In line with other Church Fathers, Irenaeus consistently affirmed the position of Scripture and the activity of Christians. The people of God were to be watchful of their leaders. "No pastor of any congregation, even if he is extremely eloquent, will say anything that varies from the truth."<sup>74</sup> Ever vigilant of error, his writings kept up the wall of truth in order to keep heresy out. And yet, his approach also laid a portion of the burden at the feet of the local body of believers. "Thus, if leaders arise claiming to be teaching in the name of Christ and Christ's church, their teaching must be tested by the standard of apostolic truth preserved in the church."<sup>75</sup> The average congregational member had a tall task of discernment.

Like Justin Martyr, the Scriptures were central to the authority and activity of the Church for Irenaeus. This centrality reflected the Apostles of Jesus. Irenaeus emphasized that "leaders

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72. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 69.

73. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 69.

74. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 96.

75. Christopher A. Hall, *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 229.

drew their authority from teaching the very same doctrines as the apostles.”<sup>76</sup> With a similar flavor seen among the earlier Church Fathers, a presbyter was not called to leverage one’s position from a place of power, but from a scriptural authority given to the role by Jesus Christ and His Word. The volunteer youth leader can utilize God’s truth with the authority of Christ while engaging all areas of a teenager’s world.

Irenaeus affirmed all believers were a part of God’s priesthood because of His gracious act in Christ. On the priesthood of all believers, Irenaeus is particularly clear. “For all of the righteous possess the priestly rank. And all the disciples of the Lord are priests.”<sup>77</sup> Historian Jaroslav Pelikan summarizes that this Church Father’s conviction aligns this “priestly order” and the Levitical priesthood to each and every Christian.<sup>78</sup> These two Greek Fathers of church history point consistently to the priesthood of all believers.

The Greek Fathers have emphasized the activity of both presbyters and laity, the authority of Scripture, and the need for cultural engagement. These areas intersect for the volunteer youth leader’s capacity to address content and culture.

### Latin Fathers

In an equivalent method to the Greek Fathers, the Latin Fathers’ primary feature for earning their title was writing in Latin. Three Latin Fathers will inform the survey via views addressing the priesthood of all believers.

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76. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 89.

77. Bercot, David W., editor, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1998), 162.

78. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine – Volume 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 160.



## Tertullian

“After Jesus Christ we have no need of speculation, after the Gospel no need of research.”<sup>79</sup> This comment of Tertullian reflects his Christology, namely, that the gospel and Jesus have the last word on our faith and life. The first Latin Father considered defines the need for keeping Scripture central. Specifically, Greenslade reflects on how Tertullian wanted all Christians “to be able to read the Bible for themselves, a motive of Christian education familiar ever since.”<sup>80</sup> Historical theology affirms the believer’s ability to read Scripture for himself.

With this context, from what does Tertullian indicate about the body of Christ as a priesthood? He highlights the local congregation is not defined first by its leaders, but by its members. In a passage calling for all believers, not just the leaders, to be people of Christian piety, Tertullian explains, “Vain will we be if we think that what is not lawful for priests is lawful for laity. Are not even we laymen priests?”<sup>81</sup>

In making an argument about the existence of falsehood following after truth, Tertullian presumes for a moment if the tradition of the church was all wrong. What would be at stake? He enumerates the activity of the church: “...the preaching of the Gospel, the acceptance of the creed, the thousands upon thousands of baptisms, the works of faith, the miracles, the gifts of grace, the priesthoods and the ministries...”<sup>82</sup> Tertullian’s argument has an end target separate from this discussion, but the summary is extremely telling. The activity of the church includes

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79. S. L. Greenslade, *Early Latin Theology: Selections from Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, and Jerome* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1956), 36.

80. Greenslade, *Early Latin Theology*, 92. This quote is a footnote within Tertullian’s discussion of “schoolmasters and the other teachers of letters.”

81. Bercot, *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, 163.

82. Greenslade, *Early Latin Theology*, 50.

“priesthoods and the ministries.” Such language points to the body of Christ being active in the work of the congregation. A singular priesthood would suffice if his focus was the leadership, but Tertullian utilizes “priesthoods.” The parallel is true for ministry. The resulting tone points to a local congregation that understands its influence is extended among the leaders and the laity. This priority is where the volunteer youth leader thrives. This member of Christ’s body has a significant ministry to invest in just as do the presbyters and all members of the local church.

Tertullian also reflects the priesthood of all believers in *De Baptismo*. He first acknowledges that the act of baptism is the usual right of the bishops, the presbyters, and the deacons.<sup>83</sup> Next, the Latin Father notes something even more informative to the question at hand. “Even laymen possess the power, ‘for what is equally received can be equally given’...Baptism which is equally a divine institution, can be administered by all.”<sup>84</sup> Tertullian is confident that the Word of God is working through the sacrament of baptism. He points to what would be right and of good order, such as the bishop or elder to conduct the institution that Jesus Himself commanded in the Great Commission, but he expresses that the need could legitimately be met by any believer. With this explanation, Tertullian both elevates the power of God’s Word and indicates all believers are capable of ministry. This view underscores the volunteer youth leader’s position and opportunity to step into effective Kingdom impact with teenagers.

Before concluding with Tertullian, it is helpful to take up one additional famous quote from him: “What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?”<sup>85</sup> Tertullian’s sequence speaks to the volunteer youth leader’s quandary: what does the wisdom of the world have to do with the

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83. Quasten, *Volume II*, 279.

84. Quasten, *Volume II*, 279.

85. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 100.

wisdom of God? “Believers should not go searching for wisdom outside of his revealed truth.”<sup>86</sup>

Tertullian’s position reflects a high value of Scripture and a healthy skepticism of cultural contributions. As the volunteer youth leader enters the crossroads of content and culture, a believer makes sense of the wisdom of the world’s claims by relying on the wisdom of God. Tertullian’s caution is against letting the wisdom of the world supplant or overshadow the wisdom of God. Although Tertullian would later be open to new prophecy from the Holy Spirit, there remains a vast distinction in his mind between the world’s influence and the Spirit’s guidance. For the volunteer youth leader, the realm of cultural engagement examines what Athens is really proposing, while clinging to the truth of Jerusalem. Such an approach the Latin Father would approve, since it keeps Scripture as the authority. Tertullian’s guidance serves to warn against surrendering the wisdom of God for the wisdom of this world, which offers the insight of biblical discernment within cultural engagement to the volunteer youth leader.

## **Jerome**

A second Latin Father for consideration is Jerome. His writings indicate two areas of interest in relationship to this topic: cultural influences and the priesthood of all believers.

What do Jerome’s writings reflect when it comes to the believer’s position in the body of Christ? In his letter to Laeta, someone that he terms a “daughter” in the faith, Jerome offers instructions about being a parent to Laeta’s own daughter, Paula.<sup>87</sup> “Thus must a soul be educated which is to be a temple of God. It must learn to hear nothing and to say nothing but

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86. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 100.

87. Greenslade, *Early Latin Theology*, 332-333.

what belongs to the fear of God.”<sup>88</sup> As a Christian parent, Jerome sees Laeta’s role includes passing on the understanding that each believer in Jesus is God’s temple. With this perspective, Jerome goes on to offer guarded terms to pass on to Paula about the world, clothes, friends, and boys. Such subjects are common for many volunteer youth leaders to address with their teens in today’s culture.

Jerome also warns that Laeta must be proactive in Paula’s lessons in such a way that Paula does not form “a dislike for them” because such an attitude “conceived in childhood may continue into her mature years.”<sup>89</sup> Are these lessons simply the rote acquisition of facts and figures? Not according to Jerome. “And let it be her task daily to repeat to you a fixed portion of Scripture.”<sup>90</sup> The content of God’s Word is essential for a Christian parent in raising up a child, but the influence does not end there. “You must yourself be her teacher, a model on which she may form her childish conduct.”<sup>91</sup> The implication for a Christian parent is vital. A caring, believing parent provides her child with an example in the faith. Jerome’s tone indicates that this responsibility is not optional. The parent will be a model, but the question remains if the parent will be an unhealthy example or a healthy one. The volunteer youth leader has a parallel core calling in Christ to the teenagers in a congregation. The training in God’s truth and the awareness of being a model are useful for consideration in this role.

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88. Greenslade, *Early Latin Theology*, 335.

89. Greenslade, *Early Latin Theology*, 335.

90. Greenslade, *Early Latin Theology*, 340.

91. Greenslade, *Early Latin Theology*, 340.

## Augustine

The last of the Latin Church Fathers is likely the most renowned of them all. Augustine is referenced with consistent interest in today's Christian circles. For the topic at hand, *The City of God* provides insight as one of Augustine's most well-known works.<sup>92</sup> Within its pages, Augustine's view of believers is encountered through his two "cities" – "the city of God" and "the city of the world."<sup>93</sup> It is not crucial to parse each concept for the purpose of this chapter, but rather to understand Augustine's summary of Christians: "'The city of God' is not, therefore, the equivalent of the external church, but neither did Augustine conceive of these entities as being antithetical. Those who believe in Christ, who are filled with His Spirit and who live in God's love, share in a spiritual fellowship. It is through this group of faithful that Christ brings His kingdom to victory."<sup>94</sup>

Augustine's view promotes an understanding of the local body of Christian believers being first a spiritual fellowship and second a spiritual force. This attitude reflects a genuine adherence to the priesthood of all believers. The collective group represents Christ's agents of change through the message of the Lord Jesus. This message is not limited to those with an internal or external calling, but is bestowed upon all Christians. Each child of God through faith in Jesus is an ambassador for Christ's Kingdom.

In his homily on Psalm 120, Augustine speaks to the congregation with regard for where the members are at in their walk with the Lord. "I appeal therefore to your faith, my Brothers, you who are the sons of the Church, and have progressed in the Church, and who will progress if

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92. Bengt Hagglund as translated by Gene J. Lund, *History of Theology* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1968), 129.

93. Hagglund, *History of Theology*, 129-131.

94. Hagglund, *History of Theology*, 131.

you have not done so, and you who will progress more and more...”<sup>95</sup> Augustine understands both the nature of the body of Christ corporately and the individual maturity of each member. Together these realities bring the priesthood of all believers into view in a way that allows for a range of one’s individual maturity, an appropriate mark for the volunteer youth leader.

How does Augustine relate to the priesthood of all believers? In order to grasp his approach, it is first productive to understand Augustine’s view of the local congregation. Augustine forwarded the “mixed church” – meaning it is “composed of sinners and saints.”<sup>96</sup> Litfin calls him “the Theologian of Grace,” because Augustine understood his past and the forgiveness and peace he had found in Jesus as an adult.<sup>97</sup> Augustine expanded on this picture of the local church as “a mixed society of both genuine and false believers.”<sup>98</sup> With his personal history before him, Augustine was painfully mindful of the capacity of the lost to be interspersed among the found in external gathering.

For the people in view of volunteer youth leaders, this definition introduces an important concern. If the local manifestation of the body of Christ can have false followers, what does this mean for the involvement of the laity? It precludes that congregational leadership knows the faith and life of the lay members. Should simply anyone be given the influence of being involved in serving the next generation? The answer from Augustine would be a resounding no. If the church is so mixed among the sincere and the superficial as the Latin Father notes, then the service of

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95. Mary T. Clark, translation and introduction, *Augustine of Hippo: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 220.

96. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 230.

97. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 230.

98. Hall, *Learning Theology*, 242.

the laity is contingent upon the shepherding oversight of congregational leaders. Once this framework is intact, Augustine joins the Early Church chorus that the laity are free to serve.

Augustine's description of Christian life includes "a thirst for God, a delight in searching for Him, joy in the Truth, willing submission to God's sovereignty, commitment to contemplation, responsiveness to the neighbor's need, an activity in the Church's worship and work, unity with all in charity."<sup>99</sup> Pieces of this statement may be regularly quoted without the whole, but since the section includes "an activity in the Church's worship and work," a reading of Augustine must include the fact that vibrant Christian life includes congregational service. This fact is demonstrated once again in *The City of God*: "...but because the Celestial City knew only one God to be worshiped and believed with faithful piety that He should be served with that service which in Greek is called latria and should be rendered only to God."<sup>100</sup> Augustine expects a child of God through faith in Jesus will be involved in the spiritual work of the local congregation as a Kingdom service to the Savior King that redeemed one's soul.

The review of these three Latin Fathers brings a similar perspective regarding the Word of God, the people of God, and the service of God. Each one addressed different challenges in their day, but it is reasonable to conclude that their unified view on the body of Christ was undergirded by a confidence in the priesthood of all believers. Augustine's writings in particular, as one who "was a spiritual wanderer that found in Jesus 'the transforming power of his mercy and grace,'" understood that each person had a confession and a calling for Kingdom service.<sup>101</sup>

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99. Clark, *Augustine of Hippo*, 43.

100. Clark, *Augustine of Hippo*, 463. The term "latria" means service or worship, with the context of sacrificially to a master.

101. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 216.

In a direct application, the volunteer youth leader stands up to testify to the next generation with confidence in Christ's calling.

### Reformation Fathers

A reader may postulate, "How can a survey of historical theology justify moving so rapidly from the early Church Fathers to the Reformers?" The answer is found in the expressions of Luther and Calvin themselves. Luther "argued that in his attempt to reform the church he was attempting to draw the church back to the apostolic tradition."<sup>102</sup> Hall writes that "Protestant luminaries such as Luther and Calvin" were consistent in tracing their efforts as a movement seeking to align with the Church Fathers.<sup>103</sup> They were not resistant or begrudging of the apostolic age, but instead, they saw their efforts within the greater account of recovering the Early Church's understanding.

### Luther

"Martin Luther warmly embraced the church fathers whenever their comments dovetailed with scripture. Luther's biblical commentaries are full of patristic citations."<sup>104</sup> Litfin explains that the Reformers' priority on Scripture alone brought them regularly into contact with the Church Fathers. "The reformers often used the ancient church as an exemplar, the very thing to which they were trying to return."<sup>105</sup>

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102. Hall, *Learning Theology*, 232.

103. Hall, *Learning Theology*, 232.

104. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 27.

105. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 26.



What were Luther's views on the local congregation? "Luther's argument was structured on a semantic similarity between the word 'priest' as it was being used in the Roman Church and the word 'priest' that St. Peter employed in his first epistle and which was also used in Exodus 19 and Revelation 5."<sup>106</sup> While the Roman Church taught "priest" equaled "the hierarchy" of church government, Luther insisted that these rights "belonged to all Christians as baptized members of the church."<sup>107</sup> Luther's goal was "to assert the rights of the baptized *Christianhood*."<sup>108</sup> In this way, it is clear that the Reformer's purpose was to recover the early church's understanding of the priesthood of all believers.

What is in focus regarding the priesthood is a point of confusion that existed in Luther's day and still exists today. Theologian Heino Kadai contends the core of it "may have some of their roots in a too narrow reading of Luther on the believers' priesthood. It is as simple a mistake as putting the apostrophe before instead of after the 's.' The usual reading has made the believer a singular being instead of one among the company of God's people."<sup>109</sup> If Kadai's premise is accurate in practice, then the gravitation to the singular use of priest underscores church leadership when the plurality indicates the richness of all believers in Kingdom service.

Luther's writings reflect that the latter view has important implications. *To the Christian Nobility*, he offers, "If we are all priests, as was said above, and all have one faith, one gospel, one sacrament, why should we not also have the power to test and judge what is right or wrong

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106. Heino O. Kadai, editor, *Accents in Luther's Theology: Essays in Commemoration of the 450<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1967), 149.

107. Kadai, *Accents in Luther's Theology*, 149.

108. Kadai, *Accents in Luther's Theology*, 149. The italicized portion is original, which shows Kadai's emphasis.

109. Kadai, *Accents in Luther's Theology*, 153.

in the matters of faith.”<sup>110</sup> Luther sees every Christian as a discerning instrument for the work of Christ’s Kingdom. “Therefore, it is the duty of every Christian to espouse the cause of the faith, to understand and defend it, and denounce every error.”<sup>111</sup> This posture is one that enlists every child of God through faith in Jesus to employ the spiritual gifts he has received and be proactive in passing on the faith, including among the young that follow behind them. The Reformer’s perspective on the priesthood of all believers readily enlists caring, believing Christian adults into the Kingdom impact of today’s adolescents.

## **Calvin**

“John Calvin considered himself and the other reformers to be more faithful to the early church fathers than the Roman Church was.”<sup>112</sup> Would it work to simply conclude that Calvin had the same perspective as Luther on these areas? Five hundred years of church history demonstrate that Calvin and Luther were not homogenous in their theological understanding, so a brief treatment of this Reformation Father is required.

Where were Calvin and Luther aligned? Two of the places are the priority of biblical theology and the definition of the Church. “Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists. For his promise cannot fail: ‘Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.’”<sup>113</sup>

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110. Kadai, *Accents in Luther’s Theology*, 158-159.

111. Kadai, *Accents in Luther’s Theology*, 159.

112. Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers*, 27.

113. William F. Keesecke, editor, *A Calvin Treasury: Selections from Institutes of the Christian Religion* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1961), 18.

Where does the divergence begin between the two? It is possible to identify a beginning based on their points of emphasis. Where Luther found himself in the throes of debates on being saved by grace through faith, Calvin was concerned about “shallow Christian living.”<sup>114</sup> If this motivation is a true reflection of his writings, then the topics of interest within this chapter for Calvin can be summarized. Calvin refers to Augustine for his understanding of unity in the Church and discipline in the local body.<sup>115</sup> The local congregation is a place for the body of believers to pursue maturity together. Church government is necessary and Christ, through its leaders, “prevents it from becoming pointless and fruitless. In this way the saints are renewed and the body of Christ is edified.”<sup>116</sup> His treatment of church leaders and the body of believers aligns with the tone of the Latin Church Fathers. “If you are embarrassed to tell anyone what sins you have committed, recite them daily to your own soul. I do not tell you to confess them to your fellow servant, who may upbraid you. Recite them to God who heals them.”<sup>117</sup> Calvin’s reflections on the condition of one’s own soul bring a clear view on his conviction about a believer being a priest in Christ. If any Christian can for himself confess sins to the Heavenly Father, then the biblical context of the priesthood of all believers is essential for this Reformer.

Historical theology offers a consistent tone. The Church has the authority of Scriptures and has called leaders to serve the body. It also consists of all believers together globally and assembled locally. The various seasons of church history testify to different challenges that the patristic leaders needed to address. Even with these difficulties, both the position of presbyters

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114. John Calvin as edited by Tony Lane and Hilary Osbourne, *The Institutes of Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1995), 237.

115. Calvin, *Institutes*, 238.

116. Calvin, *Institutes*, 245.

117. Keesecke, *Calvin Treasury*, 19.

and the priesthood of all believers have regularly been affirmed, which enables one clear picture to emerge that has both church leaders and congregational lay members active in the Kingdom service. To place these two concepts at odds with one another would be a mistake, one which would reduce their biblical and historical understanding.

### **Systematic Theology**

The third arena of examination is systematic theology. Where biblical theology examines the scriptural passages, systematic theology builds the structure that enables the reader to consider its concepts in a methodical manner. When historical theology testifies to the position of the church throughout the ages, systematic theology demonstrates the adopted understanding from God's Word to address this age. As a biblical examination on the intersection of content and culture, many topics could be addressed. When viewed through the context of a volunteer youth ministry, three areas of systematic theology become clear to this discussion: Bibliology, anthropology, and ecclesiology.

### **Bibliology**

Bibliology is the systematic study of the theological doctrine of the Bible.<sup>118</sup> Two points of application are useful for this discussion: Scripture's perspicuity and Scripture's sufficiency. Perspicuity explains the clear nature of the Word of God.<sup>119</sup> If it is plain, then the Bible enables ordained leaders and lay members alike to be confident in what content is needed to be

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118. Search of term 'bibliology,' accessed on November 3, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bibliology>.

119. John Theodore Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics: A Handbook of Doctrinal Theology for Pastors, Teachers, and Laymen* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 138.

communicated. In the *Smallcald Articles*, “Luther felt able to boast that as a consequence of the Reformation ‘a seven-year-old child knows what the church is.’”<sup>120</sup> This simple accessibility demonstrates the focus on the Word’s working to make plain these truths. Systematics professor Wayne A. Grudem explains that although there exists passages that are hard to understand, it does not undermine the fact that the Bible is revealed by God in a fashion in order to be understood.<sup>121</sup> J. T. Mueller expands on this summary in *Christian Dogmatics* by indicating that the perspicuity involved within the pages of Scripture is how “it sets forth all doctrines of salvation in words so simple and plain that they can be understood by all persons of average intelligence.”<sup>122</sup> Since Scripture is clear, believers who read it can receive its content and can convey its content with confidence.

Scripture’s sufficiency points to the nature of the Bible as the complete special revelation from the Lord, which means that it is the sole source and norm of faith and life.<sup>123</sup> Grudem indicates that this reality emphasizes that “God considers what he has told us in the Bible to be enough for us.”<sup>124</sup> When the Bible is enough, it is the primary focus and not the person interpreting it:

In Luther’s view of Scripture is the idea that the Bible can be understood from out of itself, each person acting as his own interpreter. The interpretations of tradition or of the clergy are not necessary for a right understanding of the Bible (as Roman Catholic theologians have said). The Word possesses in itself an ‘external clarity’ which it conveys and administers through the office of the ministry (*in ministerio verbi*). It is for

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120. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine – Vol. 4: Reformation of a Church and Dogma (1300-1700)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 173.

121. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Jointly Published – Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House & Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 105.

122. J. T. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, 138.

123. J. T. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, 90-91.

124. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 127.

this reason as well that Scripture – without the addition of human commands and doctrinal opinions – is the sole foundation of faith.<sup>125</sup>

The result is that the Word of God is both clear to its reader and enough for faith as well as life by that faith in Jesus. All believers are thus invited to rely on the Bible.

### Anthropology

Anthropology is the theological examination of human beings including their “origin, nature, and destiny.”<sup>126</sup> A systematic theological study of people births a wide range of subjects, but two are germane in this discussion, namely, the sinfulness of humankind and the dominion of humankind.

In his four volume work *Systematic Theology*, Norman Geisler notes how humanity deals with original sin and actual sin, which produces its primary effect of “spiritual separation from God.”<sup>127</sup> Grudem explains further, “When Adam sinned, God thought of all who would descend from Adam as sinners.”<sup>128</sup> Original sin points to the fact that we inherit guilt from Adam. Actual sin reflects the voluntary acts committed against God. This tension remains for the believer. The propensity to sin in the old nature does not disappear after conversion to Christ. The war within the child of God now places the old nature and new nature at odds with one another. “Though people sometimes persuade themselves that they have good reasons for sinning, when examined in the cold light of truth on the last day, it will be seen in every case that sin ultimately just does

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125. Hagglund, *History of Theology*, 222-223.

126. Search of term ‘anthropology’, accessed on November 3, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anthropology>.

127. Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume 3* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2004), 126.

128. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 494-495.

not make sense.”<sup>129</sup> It is important to see that one’s justification is not forfeited when a believer sins and true believers can fall into sin.<sup>130</sup> At the same time, “our legal standing before God is unchanged” when a Christian sins.<sup>131</sup> The consequences of sin remain, but the believer stands in the “blessed state where he has peace with God.”<sup>132</sup>

In addition to sinfulness, humankind is also dealing with the responsibility that the Lord has given within creation. In Genesis, God puts humanity in a stewardship role that includes dominion over creation.<sup>133</sup> Original sin impacts our relationship with the environment. The responsibility was “to rule over it, not ruin it; to cultivate it, not pollute it.”<sup>134</sup> This responsibility has been marred by sin, but the cultivating call has not been repealed. Ultimately, people’s dominion is under the Lord’s authority and power, but the creative oversight is still intact.

Albert Wolters describes this tension within the terms of structure and direction. “Structure denotes the ‘essence’ of a creaturely thing, the kind of creature it is by virtue of God’s creational law. Direction, by contrast, refers to a sinful deviation from that structural ordinance and renewed conformity to it in Christ.”<sup>135</sup> As a result, the believer is called by God to be engaged in discerning the structure and realigning the direction within the dominion given by the Creator. This realm uncovers the Church’s activity within culture. How this culture is created

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129. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 493.

130. Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 281.

131. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 504.

132. J. T. Mueller, *Christian Dogmatics*, 381.

133. Genesis 1:28.

134. Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 127.

135. Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 88.

demands attention beyond the scope of this chapter, so it is a topic to which the next chapter can be addressed in order to provide a paradigm for engagement.

### Ecclesiology

Ecclesiology is the systematic study of the doctrines regarding the Church.<sup>136</sup> This area includes what defines a church, what is the church's purpose, who is involved in the church as well as other related topics. The scope of ecclesiology is broader than the topic at hand. This examination will be limited to where content and culture intersect, which brings into view the congregation's nature and the priesthood of all believers.

The early Church Fathers spoke of the Church often. They understood what made it set apart. "The church, the Scriptures, the priesthood, the sacraments – all were called 'holy,' both because they were holy in themselves and because they made men holy by the sanctifying grace whose instruments they were."<sup>137</sup> This statement reflects the global church, but regularly in the field of systematics the local congregation is also recognized. Later Church Fathers would further confirm this perspective:

For the church was "the assembly of all believers, among whom the gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel." That definition, as it was formulated, was intended to be a maximum, distinguishing the Evangelical view from views of the church that added other institutional requirements such as liturgical uniformity or obedience to the papacy; but it acted as a minimum definition as well, denying a right to name "church" where these two conditions did not obtain.<sup>138</sup>

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136. Search of term 'ecclesiology', accessed on November 3, 2017, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ecclesiology>.

137. Pelikan, *Christian Tradition: Vol. I*, 156.

138. Pelikan, *Christian Tradition: Vol. IV*, 173.



The local congregation is in view with the Word of God and sacraments as the distinguishing marks. When one speaks of the Church, “it is the invisible body and it is the externally gathered fellowship.”<sup>139</sup> Both avenues are needed for a proper perspective.

Did this definition of the Church impact matters for those interested in systematics? For Luther, it certainly did. “In order to understand Luther’s concept of the church we ought rather to use the term ‘the Christian congregation,’ since the word ‘church’ as used in our day has a connotation which it did not have in Luther’s mind.”<sup>140</sup> Within his *Ten Sermons on the Catechism* in 1528, Luther notes that the communion of saints is to be understood as “group [Haufe], as we say in German...or congregation [Gemeine], that is, a holy, Christian group, assembly, or in German, the holy common church, and it is a word which not be called ‘communion’ [Gemeinschaft], but rather ‘a congregation’ [eine Gemeinde].”<sup>141</sup> As a systematic theologian, the Reformer’s ecclesiology is evident. The local congregation is the gathering of Christian believers. For modern systematic theologians, the view remains the same. The church is invisible and visible, covering the centuries and moving in this moment, global and local.<sup>142</sup>

What about the priesthood of all believers? Is it seen distinct from local church leaders or is it treated as synonymous with them? “For another distinction of Augustinism and the Reformation, however, there is considerable support in the teaching of the second- and third-century fathers: the distinction between the hierarchical priesthood and the priesthood of all

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139. Pelikan, *Christian Tradition: Vol. I*, 244-245.

140. Hagglund, *History of Theology*, 244.

141. Helmut T. Lehmann, general editor with John W. Doberstein, translator, *Luther’s Works: Volume 51 – Sermons I* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1959), 166-167.

142. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 853-857.

believers.”<sup>143</sup> Pelikan explains that the early fathers were demonstrating the link between the Old Testament understanding of priests and the church’s ministers, but at the same time, the concept of the priesthood of believers “remained alongside this development.”<sup>144</sup>

In *Called to Believe, Teach, and Confess*, Steven Mueller explains that this concept is one that simply cannot afford to be discarded by today’s local congregation. “It is often forgotten that when God established the Aaronic priesthood, he also said that all of this people would be priests. ... (Exodus 19:5-6). Israel had priests, but the whole nation was to serve God in a priesthood and be holy. God was faithful to his promises, but Israel was not.”<sup>145</sup> The intention of the Lord was for the people of God to be a nation of priests for His name. The disobedience of Israel did not deny the Lord’s design. The promise of God has had its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Through His victory, all believers have this position:

In this priesthood, there is no distinction between Christians. Church workers are priests because they are Christians, but all other Christians are priests in the same way. Men and women equally serve as priests before God. An individual may also be a minister, but that is something different from the priesthood. Well-meaning Christians sometimes say that everyone is a minister. It would be much more consistent with Scripture to say that every Christian is a priest. Each child of God is called to this life of priestly service.<sup>146</sup>

What this dual perspective means is that there is a place for both healthy church leaders and an active church body serving as priests through the grace of God. The metaphors in the Bible for the Church bear fruit that this holy and royal priesthood, this body of Christ, and this temple made of living stones are connected and engaged.<sup>147</sup> Pelikan goes on to indicate the practical

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143. Pelikan, *Christian Tradition: Vol. I*, 160.

144. Pelikan, *Christian Tradition: Vol. I*, 160.

145. Steven P. Mueller, editor, *Called to Believe, Teach, and Confess: An Introduction to Doctrinal Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005), 407.

146. S. P. Mueller, *Called to Believe*, 408.

147. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 858.

implication. “Under the new covenant every Christian is a priest in the sense that he can come into the presence of God.”<sup>148</sup> The question again may come to the forefront if this dismisses the role of the church leaders. Since believers can come to the Lord without the aid of other people, does this fact drain the purpose away from congregation leaders? Whether pastor or bishop, overseers in a local body “carry out the priestly task on behalf of the congregation.”<sup>149</sup> This understanding enriches the opportunity of called congregational leaders and places these believers in their proper relationship to the entire body.

Are there any limits on this teaching? Does the age of the particular Christian influence the priesthood of all believers? Luther does not think there are any limits. With a recognition that a child is brought to the Lord by God’s grace in the sacrament of baptism, Luther then extends this systematic understanding to even an infant. “Therefore, children right from the cradle on should begin to pray for the princes, for their brethren and companions.”<sup>150</sup> Even the youngest among the brethren have the ability to call on their Heavenly Father in the name of Jesus and to intercede for government leaders, for fellow believers, and for their friends. The priesthood of all believers is now in full view. Believers of all ages have the opportunity to intercede, to love, and to serve in Jesus’ name.

The result of this survey within Bibliology, anthropology, and ecclesiology is a profound awe of God’s Word, God’s grace, and God’s people. The combination of these three areas of systematic theology brings a sharpened picture to the place where truth and testimony reside. Such an intersection is the very essence of the conversation on content and culture. It recognizes

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148. Pelikan, *Christian Tradition: Vol. IV*, 246.

149. Pelikan, *Christian Tradition: Vol. IV*, 246.

150. Lehmann and Doberstein, *Luther’s Works*, 171. Quoting Luther.

the authority of Scripture, the limitations of humankind, and the responsibility of all believers. The Word of God has the content and the people of God have the purpose of connection.

In summary, systematic theology indicates two necessary features in each of three subjects of Bibliology, anthropology, and ecclesiology. Within Bibliology, the perspicuity and sufficiency of Scripture are found. The Word of God is clear. The Holy Spirit inspired the inerrant and infallible Scriptures, so the Bible is plain in revealing what He wanted made known. The Scriptures are also sufficient. The nature of this special revelation means that it is enough for pointing people to faith in Jesus Christ and to life in this world. These facts orient congregational leaders and lay members alike to the advantages of relying on God's Word.

Anthropology demonstrates the sinfulness of humankind and the dominion of humankind. The realities of original and actual sin cannot be overlooked in thinking about people, even in their renewed state. Christians are redeemed, but they carry the effects of the Fall and their own flesh forward with them. The dominion established in the Garden of Eden was not removed by the Lord after the Fall. Christians have a calling as image bearers of Jesus to be creators of culture, which includes this pursuit within their congregations and their communities.

Within ecclesiology, two areas have shown to be useful for consideration: the local congregation and the priesthood of all believers. The local congregation is a sound application of the universal church. It has its charter from the Word of God and the sacraments of the Lord Jesus Christ. The local congregation is complete when it has the Word of God, the sacraments from God, and the people of God. This first application leads into the second one of the priesthood of all believers. Systematics illuminate that this concept has been seen in expressions from early, Reformation, and modern theologians. The promises of Scripture from the Old Testament to the New Testament testify to the people of God as a priesthood. This perspective

does not dismiss congregational leaders, but instead underscores that this identity is experienced by the body of Christ together as all believers love the Lord and serve in His name.

The truths found in the review of systematic theology uncover an additional application. Systematic theology itself functions as an intersection of content from God's Word and culture from the world. The systematic practitioner engages a changing culture with unchanging content of Scripture. Systematics spends its energy addressing the crossroads for the sake of God's people to be active in God's calling.

When it comes to the volunteer youth leader, a person can have confidence in biblical content to share based on the implications that Bibliology and ecclesiology have offered along with a healthy respect and scope received from anthropology. The result is a volunteer youth leader who is aptly positioned for identifying how to participate in conversations for cultural engagement with the content of God's Word.

## **Conclusion**

The biblical examination of the intersection of content and culture has demonstrated the need for God's Word brought by God's people to the culture as well as God's people reviewing the culture and coming back to God's Word. Biblical theology enlightens the reader to the many Scriptures that speak to this challenge, which indicate that the struggle involved is both nothing new and is substantial to address. Historical theology is consistent from the early Church Fathers to the Reformers that the local congregation, the influence of Scripture, and the priesthood of all believers are significant concepts for healthy involvement. Systematic theology equally testifies through Bibliology, anthropology, and ecclesiology that God's Word communicated by God's people serves God's purposes in this world.

Drawing from the scriptural and theological evidence of this chapter, it is abundantly clear that the authority of God's Word and the participation of the priesthood of all believers are essential for healthy youth ministry.

Since the intersection of content and culture invites all Christians to be voices of engagement with God's truth, the volunteer youth leader has an important "song to be sung" in the lives of the next generation. How can a volunteer youth leader be provided a better awareness of their platform? In what ways can a volunteer youth leader be equipped for the communication that this activity demands at the intersection of content and culture? This assessment is worthy of further study for the sake of equipping the saints for the work of service through the hands and feet of these vital priests in Christ's Kingdom.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE CONSIDERATION OF CULTURE

#### **Introduction**

National youth ministry conferences in the United States are an environment for great interaction between leaders of all experience levels within the field. From the volunteer worker to the vocational professional, gathering thousands of Kingdom servants together under one roof can be an exciting proposition. At one such event, this reviewer had the opportunity to hold a brief, informal interview with a nationally recognized youth ministry expert. The individual is the author of a number of books and a common main stage speaker for such events. This student of youth ministry was interested in probing the question of the volunteer youth leader's role with the veteran presenter. When introduced to the topic, the national youth ministry guru asked in return for a summary of how many volunteer leaders nationally and how many vocational youth leaders across the country are active within the congregations in question. Upon offering the data, the skillful youth ministry author's advice was to focus the national energy for training and encouraging on the vocational youth leaders.<sup>1</sup>

Why are those in youth ministry circles so prone to overlook the influence of the volunteer youth leader? Is the expert above correct? Should all the energy for effective youth ministry be leveraged toward those in paid positions? How does culture and the cultural context of a congregation and community influence this discussion? Is there a way that the volunteer youth leader could have an advantage over the vocational leader?

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1. Personal exchange at the Simply Youth Ministry Conference with a recognized youth ministry leader in the United States, whose name has been withheld since inclusion of this summary has not been cleared with that individual. Chicago, Illinois. March 6, 2011.

In the previous chapter on the crossroads of content and culture, the focus was given to the arena of content. Content's intersection with culture was examined from a biblical, historical, and theological perspective. In addition, attention was given to where this discussion has direct implications for the volunteer youth leader.

This chapter will focus on the side of the equation embodied by culture. Culture will be examined in its definition and its theology. A literary review will inform the reviewer's direction on cultural engagement. This discussion will lead in the next place to the practice of cultural engagement for the volunteer youth leader.

### **Capturing a Sense of Culture**

What is culture? The definition of such a term can be very difficult to work with since it relies on its own meaning. In other words, how does one give context for a term that is itself about context? Merriam-Webster offers a four-fold explanation within its first definition.<sup>2</sup> First, it is a group's "everyday existence," which is commonly expressed in an example of popular culture. This portion is helpful for the volunteer youth leader to acknowledge popular culture's existence and influence. Second, culture is an organization's "shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices." This phrase immediately points to the congregational context of what a local church believes. One congregation may have a conviction about baptism that is different from another local church. Third, culture is a particular field's "set of values, conventions, or social practices." A congregation holds to its commonly established approach. The volunteer youth leader may encounter one local church that puts a high priority on serving others in the community, whereas another congregation puts that same level of emphasis on small groups. Fourth, culture is "the

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2. Search of term "culture," accessed on September 28, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture>.



integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations.”<sup>3</sup> This definition is especially intriguing since it notes both the belief of people involved and the passing on of those beliefs to the generations that follow. If not apparent earlier to the observer, this four-fold explanation of culture demonstrates that it is a significant part of a youth ministry’s considerations, and as such, it is something for the volunteer youth leader to give direct attention.

How do academics flesh out the term? In *Everyday Theology*, Kevin Vanhoozer suggests as a theologian that culture is “works and worlds of meaning.”<sup>4</sup> The activity and influence of culture are clearly primary in this definition. As an anthropologist, Clifford Geertz affirms that cultures are “systems of shared meanings.”<sup>5</sup> After offering this citation, William Romanowski expands on it by noting that culture is “the realm of human activity and its results, both material and nonmaterial products.”<sup>6</sup> Such a definition demonstrates that culture includes the tangible parts of human activity, such as social and economic areas, and it involves the more abstract parts of values, beliefs, and traditions.

In *Transforming Worldviews*, Paul Hiebert defines the term culture by going to the genesis of it being used in American anthropology. Hiebert notes the definition in this discipline carries the sense of “the patterns of learned beliefs and behavior that order human activities.”<sup>7</sup>

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3. Definition 1d of “culture,” accessed on September 28, 2018, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/culture>.

4. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Charles A. Anderson, and Michael J. Sleasman, editors, *Everyday Theology: How to Read Cultural Texts and Interpret Trends*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 21.

5. William Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 48.

6. Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Open*, 49.

7. Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2008), 16.

The concept of ordering activities is of particular interest to this discussion, because the communication involves an awareness of both beliefs and behaviors. Hiebert goes on to comment on the work of anthropologists with their efforts to integrate systems of understanding to cultural patterns. Whether starting with the particular parts or beginning with the perceived universal traits, Hiebert explains the struggle for the ordered evaluation of the behavioral structures of culture can move to looking at humanity without a spiritual dimension or with a spiritual dimension.<sup>8</sup>

As an author focused on cultural engagement, Walt Mueller defines culture as “what we believe, what we do and how we live our lives from day to day.”<sup>9</sup> Mueller goes on to describe all the influences and contributions of culture as “soup” that people find themselves in daily.<sup>10</sup> This word picture provides an insightful way to think about how today’s generation of young people are navigating the world.

Mueller continues by noting six main characteristics about culture.<sup>11</sup> First, culture is created by God and given to humanity from the biblical perspective. It is something worth cultivating. Second, culture is universal. Mueller succinctly states, “Where there are people, there is culture.”<sup>12</sup> Mueller acknowledges that there will be a wide variety in the ways in which culture is expressed, but a people group will never be void of it. Third, culture is shared.<sup>13</sup> It is

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8. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 16-25.

9. Walt Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture: Bridging Teen Worldviews and Christian Truth*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 112.

10. W. Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 112-113.

11. W. Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 113-115.

12. W. Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 114.

13. W. Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 114.

the collection of the beliefs and practices for a particular macrosystem or microsystem of society. Fourth, culture is learned.<sup>14</sup> People observe and adopt beliefs and practices from their surroundings. Fifth, culture is an integrated whole.<sup>15</sup> Reflecting on missiologist David Hesselgrave, Mueller notes how a cultural context has parts that are “interrelated” to others.<sup>16</sup> There are influences bound up within a culture. Last, culture is not static.<sup>17</sup> Change is a common element of a culture, and in turn, a needed ingredient to understand for analysis. These pieces together provide a set of insights that can equip the volunteer youth leader to serve teenagers in the congregational setting.

The volunteer youth leader also swims in this “soup” just like teenagers. He or she may regularly recognize some of the cultural texts involved, but in most cases has limited time to identify, discern, and respond to them since the majority of the volunteer youth leader’s time is given to simply staying afloat. Introducing a theological perspective and then a practical lens for engagement will be particularly helpful to advancing this discussion.

### **Considering a Theology of Culture**

Since culture has been shown to be a significant term for youth ministry, how should a youth leader think theologically about culture? H. Richard Niebuhr’s classic *Christ and Culture* covers the spectrum of views within Christianity.<sup>18</sup> Summarized in table 1, Niebuhr notes the range from the poles of “Christ against Culture” (Type I) to “Christ of Culture” (Type II). The

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14. W. Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 114.

15. W. Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 115.

16. W. Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 115.

17. W. Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 115.

18. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1952), Introduction xliii-lv.

**Table 1. Niebuhr’s Christ and Culture Types**

	Type I	Type IV	Type V	Type III	Type II
Term	“Against”	“Paradox”	“Transformer”	“Above”	“Of”
Action	Supplants	Oscillates	Converts	Architects	Assimilates
Theologian	Tertullian	Luther	Augustine	Thomas <sup>a</sup>	Clement <sup>b</sup>

*Source:* Data adapted from H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1952).

<sup>a</sup> Thomas refers to Thomas Aquinas, the thirteenth century theologian and philosopher.

<sup>b</sup> Clement refers to Clement of Alexandria, late second century to early third century Greek Church Father.

theologian elected to identify the ends of the spectrum first within his work and then to explain the mediating positions. Within the three mediating descriptions, Niebuhr summarizes them as “Christ above Culture” (Type III – close to Type II), “Christ and Culture in Paradox” (Type IV – close to Type I), and “Christ Transforming Culture” (Type V – the median of the entire range). Niebuhr’s chapters oscillate back and forth to demonstrate how what he terms “*motifs* and *countermotifs*” seek to sort out the common questions about this dynamic.<sup>19</sup> The end result is a spectrum of the five categories identified as “types” emphasizing the Divine World at the pole of Type I and the Natural World on the other end at Type II.<sup>20</sup>

The lasting contribution of Niebuhr for the question in view is not the names that he associated with the different stripes of understanding, but the priorities of each approach. Reflecting on Niebuhr’s types, author and veteran youth ministry professor Duffy Robbins indicates, “Each position brings its own strengths and inherent dangers.”<sup>21</sup> Robbins continues by

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19. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 231. The italics as presented are original including the way the word “countermotifs” is listed.

20. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 231.

21. David (Duffy) Robbins, *This Way to Youth Ministry: An Introduction to the Adventure* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/YouthSpecialties Publishing, 2004), 265. Chapter 8 – “Reading the Water: Thinking about Culture” discusses the topic’s importance.

noting that the evangelical position has gravitated to the end of the spectrum with Types I, IV, and V. He also cites Hesselgrave highlighting the contributions of those three types.<sup>22</sup> When prepared to draw from the strengths of those three types, the volunteer youth leader will be better equipped for cultural engagement in his or her immediate context.

Since Niebuhr's seminal work is almost eight decades old, theologian D. A. Carson more recently undertook reviewing the work in *Christ and Culture Revisited*. Carson contends that Niebuhr's typology "simply will not do" on the grounds that it is not guided by Scripture.<sup>23</sup> Carson's concern is noble, but it is consistently mishandled. Throughout the book, Carson seems to confuse typology (or motif) for rigid categorical definition. Carson seems unwilling to look at the five types Niebuhr presents as a spectrum, but only uses them as categories of definitive stances. At the same time, Carson borrows repeatedly from the types of "Christ against culture" (Type I) and "Christ and Culture in Paradox" (Type IV) and in the same breath wants to reduce them or possibly even eliminate them.<sup>24</sup>

Carson indirectly highlights the strengths of multiple types in viewing culture, especially in his attempt to use types that he wants to remove. Carson's discussion has the effect opposite of his intention, revealing Niebuhr's spectrum is best positioned to inform believers in Jesus Christ on the contributions of the historical theological continuum. The volunteer youth leader's awareness of these types would be a valuable support as one makes sense of communicating content in one's context. But how can it be best framed for the volunteer youth leader to understand and apply for the benefit of training the next generation with an integrated faith?

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22. Robbins, *This Way to Youth Ministry*, 265.

23. D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 200.

24. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited*, 60.

Within the essays that comprise *Theology of Culture*, Paul Tillich seeks to explain this pursuit as “a religious interpretation of the autonomous culture and its development” with respect to the view that “in every cultural creation...an ultimate concern is expressed.”<sup>25</sup> Tillich contends that from a religious viewpoint, one that expects God’s activity in and through humanity, each cultural sample offers something echoing the divine. When Tillich uses the term “religion,” he explores the middle ground between a theological and a philosophical concept. This approach can be seen as Tillich defines religion as “being ultimately concerned about that which is and should be our ultimate concern.”<sup>26</sup> With this framework, Tillich continues to portray the religion and culture relationship by noting, “Religion as ultimate concern is the meaning-giving substance of culture, and culture is the totality of forms in which the basic concern of religion expresses itself. ...religion is the substance of culture, culture is the form of religion.”<sup>27</sup> This approach means that there is no cultural text void of religious understanding, whatever that view of God may hold. It further means there is no religious activity that does not express its demonstration in a given cultural setting.

The results of this approach have universal reach. Every volunteer youth leader has a responsibility to adhere to the truths of God’s unchanging Scripture and to address them with an audience that is enveloped in a changing culture. Drawing attention to how culture impacts people, Hiebert highlights, “All our attempts to understand what God has revealed in Scripture are partial and biased by our historical and cultural perspectives.”<sup>28</sup> A leader must recognize one

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25. Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford Press, 1959), 27.

26. Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 40.

27. Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 42.

28. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 265.

is not immune to culture's activity, being a person within it. Tillich affirms the difficulty of the task. "The great art of the religious educator is to transform the primitive literalism with respect to the religious symbols into a conceptual interpretation without destroying the power of the symbols."<sup>29</sup> One may object from a view of Scriptural inerrancy on Tillich's use of "primitive" and "symbols," which is warranted, but his point is clear. The challenge for the volunteer youth leader is effective and faithful translation of truths into this culture.

As a successor, Tom F. Driver holds the position of the Paul Tillich Professor of Theology and Culture at Union Theological Seminary.<sup>30</sup> From Driver's perspective on a theology of culture, he points to three references – "the pedagogical, the anthropological, and the theological."<sup>31</sup> The distinction between the instruction and the humanity is intriguing to Driver, because of the influence of both formal learning and informal adoption as methods of acquiring cultural awareness. Since both are actively involved for Driver, the phrase "theology of culture" is brought forward as a way of expressing the formal truths of theology in a given cultural context.<sup>32</sup> Driver does want to make certain that the cultural expression for theology stays active in this process. The concern here is if the cultural expression could ever overshadow the content being communicated, then the supernatural power of the content could be lost in translation. This observation gives rise to a discussion of cultural analysis, which will be addressed in the next section.

Between the discussion of Hiebert, Tillich, and Driver, theology of culture presents a complex concept. It is one that is comprised of two packed terms – theology and culture – and as

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29. Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 155.

30. Tom F. Driver, "Theology of Culture," *Religious Education* 82, no. 2 (1987): 266.

31. Driver, "Theology of Culture," 262.

32. Driver, "Theology of Culture," 266-267.

a result, can be directed into a variety of sub-categories. Many, if not most, volunteer youth leaders receive a single theological tradition. Even on the occasion of benefiting from dual theological perspectives, the volunteer youth leader typically has a limited awareness concerning the theology of culture. What if these competent caregivers were provided a broader view of what Niebuhr termed “the enduring problem” of addressing Christ and culture?<sup>33</sup> What would it do for congregations and families if the passionate and persevering “volunteer Vicky” had a tangible way to enter this evaluation?<sup>34</sup> These questions lead to an evaluation of how culture influences youth ministry practice.

### **Conducting a Chorus of Practice**

In the previous chapter, the historical view of the congregation included the contribution of Ignatius. This Apostolic Father spoke of the congregation’s activity as a choir, and with this picture, the leaders are linked in unison for leading the song to be sung with one voice through Jesus Christ.<sup>35</sup> Such a metaphor gives insight on how youth ministry can be employed in practice. Ignatius saw the presbytery as the leaders, but through the priesthood of all believers the volunteer youth leader has a parallel role with teenagers that the pastor does with the entire congregation.

The choir director’s guidance parallels the volunteer youth leader’s activity. The content to be sung by the teenagers is identified and the choir repeats the tune and text, in order to grow

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33. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 2. Niebuhr explores this in Chapter 1.

34. The researcher is indebted to the acquaintance through the National Network of Youth Ministries (NNYM) that introduced the terminology “volunteer Vicky” at the Youth Ministries Executive Council (YMEC) in approximately 2014-2015. The researcher’s limited recall suggests that it was Dr. David Blair, Church of God International, but it could have been one of the other national and international guests gathered at YMEC.

35. Jack N. Sparks, editor, *Apostolic Fathers: Modern Translation of These Early Christian Writings* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1978), 78.



in proficiency. At the same time, the teenagers are hearing a different tune and text outside of choir practice. It surrounds them and it is inadvertently (or intentionally) carried into their choir practice. Some tunes and texts strengthen the singers, because these vocalists find in them reasons to drive back to the priority of the choir's text and tune. Other texts and tunes are in dissonance with the main choir song, holding a completely different musical priority. How is the choir director to handle these layers?

This description introduces that the volunteer youth leader will benefit from an analysis, an approach, and an application when it comes to culture and teenagers. The quality of the choir's song depends on it.

### The Analysis of Culture

The first challenge for the leader is how to make sense of the different tunes and texts that are introduced. Contextualization is the “authentic biblical”<sup>36</sup> expression after careful theological reflection.<sup>37</sup> The amount of contextualization definitions has multiplied since the term was introduced in the 1970s and there does not yet appear to be harmony on its definition.<sup>38</sup> Hesselgrave uncovers, “Whatever its definition, contextualization involves knowledge of both a message and an audience.”<sup>39</sup> This recognition provides the volunteer youth leader with a perspective: the message of Christ with His Word and the audience of American adolescents. Hesselgrave continues to refine a perspective for the reader: “Christian contextualization can be

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36. David J. Hesselgrave, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2000), 32.

37. Hesselgrave, *Contextualization*, 53.

38. Hesselgrave, *Contextualization*, 32-35.

39. Hesselgrave, *Contextualization*, 128.

**Table 2. Contextualization Options**

	Translational	Existential
Starting Point	Message	Audience
Ending Point	Audience	Message
First Priority	Message's Content	Audience's Culture

*Source:* Data adapted from David J. Hesselgrave, *Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2000), 32-34.

*Note:* Since this thesis-project addresses the volunteer youth leader, it is beyond the scope of this project to answer all the strengths and weaknesses of each contextualization option. The researcher presumes the volunteer youth leader has a growing knowledge of the Word of God and increasing awareness of the impact of one's own culture.

thought of as the attempt to communicate the message of the person, works, Word, and will of God in a way that is faithful to God's revelation, especially as it is put forth in the teaching of Holy Scripture, and that is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential contexts."<sup>40</sup>

In table 2, two major contextualization options are presented. Hesselgrave highlights Bruce J. Nicholls' definition of contextualization as "the translation of the unchanging content of the gospel of Christ's Kingdom into verbal form meaningful to the peoples in their separate culture and within their particular existential situations."<sup>41</sup> This definition shows the two common starting points for contextualization. First, the "translational" approach begins with the message or text and brings it to the audience. Second, the "existential" method starts with the audience and brings them to the message or text.

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40. Hesselgrave, *Contextualization*, 200.

41. Hesselgrave, *Contextualization*, 32-34.

Both options quickly raise questions. Within the pages of *Contextualization: Theology of Gospel and Culture*, Nicholls notes the concerns for what he terms “cultural or theological syncretism.”<sup>42</sup> Nicholls’ appeal is to weigh the potential errors of both approaches. He warns against “uncritically” using the audience’s language and also to be on guard for what “relativizes the nature of truth.”<sup>43</sup> As cited in Hesselgrave, Nicholls also acknowledges the fears that arise from either starting point, namely “the fear of irrelevance if contextualization is not attempted, and the fear of compromise and syncretism if it is taken too far.”<sup>44</sup>

So the study of the audience and the audience’s culture continues. In reflecting on the contributions of Charles Kraft from an existential method, Hesselgrave explains that the messenger “must ‘exegete’ culture, not just the Bible. Only then can he disciple the nations by ‘teaching them to observe all that [the Lord] commanded’ (Matt. 28:20) in a culture-sensitive way.”<sup>45</sup> With reverence to Scripture and with respect to the audience, the volunteer youth leader steps forward knowing that the messenger “cannot communicate without concerning himself with culture because communication is inextricable from culture.”<sup>46</sup> Although highlighted from different angles, Hiebert, Tillich, Kraft, and Hesselgrave would all affirm Kraft’s last line. In the words of Driver, “theology is misunderstood if it is not recognized as arising within and in some measure functioning as the expression *of* its culture.”<sup>47</sup>

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42. Bruce J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 30-31.

43. Nicholls, *Contextualization*, 30-31.

44. Hesselgrave, *Contextualization*, 55.

45. David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication, 2nd Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1991), 119.

46. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*, 129.

47. Driver, “Theology of Culture,” 266. Italics original.

Is this cultural understanding asking too much of the volunteer youth leader or is such a person in a prime position for the task? Theodore Dalrymple notes in *Our Culture, What's Left of It* an intriguing parallel situation. Within his essay "After Empire," Dalrymple traces the tension of British culture inserted into African country contexts that were once occupied by the British Empire.<sup>48</sup> The post-colonial struggles were addressed by one primary method: "train more people."<sup>49</sup> Youth ministry would quickly echo this direction in many ways, but through his years of living in some of these countries, Dalrymple uncovers the primary problem with this approach:

The naïve supposition on which the argument for education rests is that training counteracts and overpowers a cultural worldview. A trained man is but a clone of his trainer, on this theory, sharing his every attitude and worldview. But in fact what results is a curious hybrid, whose fundamental beliefs may be impervious to the education he has received.<sup>50</sup>

In other words, the British sensibilities were not automatically transferred through this training to local African leaders. What was a downfall in world conquest could open an insight for Christ's Kingdom purpose. The British trainers offered concepts from an imported source, but failed to understand the cultural context and worldview to which they were sent. The volunteer youth leader is quite the opposite. Knowing the cultural context and local worldview in which they already operate, these leaders could leverage their existing awareness for Christ and his Kingdom. Instead of external training, tools that are adaptable for the volunteer youth leader's internal application may prove productive.

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48. Theodore Dalrymple, *Our Culture, What's Left of It: The Mandarins and the Masses* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publishers, 2005), 311-323.

49. Dalrymple, *Our Culture*, 320.

50. Dalrymple, *Our Culture*, 321.

For far too long, youth ministry in the United States has elevated the vocational professional to the neglect of the volunteer youth leader. If the reach and effectiveness of biblical, healthy youth ministry among the emerging generations is going to be enhanced, it will include redirecting the resources and attention of congregations to the volunteer youth leader. It will also develop meaningful tools that are not simply handed from the paid youth leader's desk to the volunteer, but are fashioned from the beginning with an adaptable spirit for the volunteer youth leader's utilization.

### The Approach to Culture

The second challenge for the leader is how to interact with the text and tunes involved. Using one end of Niebuhr's spectrum from above, namely "Christ against Culture," "Christ and Culture in Paradox," and "Christ Transforming Culture," it is discovered that these three form a triad of approaches that evangelical Christians consistently appeal to for action. There exists a variation in emphasis, but a consistent acknowledgement of this triad surfaces. Table 3 will be populated by the wording of authors seeking to spur the Church on to healthy cultural engagement and it will demonstrate the parallels between these authors. With a working knowledge of Niebuhr's spectrum, the theological and practical approaches of early 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian writers find alignment in their cultural engagement.

Within the pages of *Renaissance: The Power of the Gospel However Dark the Times*, Os Guinness reminds the Body of Christ of three distinct methods to approaching culture.<sup>51</sup> He terms them a way in which a Christian "engages purposefully," thinks with "spiritual and cultural discernment," and lives when needed with a "grand refusal." This purposeful

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51. Os Guinness, *Renaissance: The Power of the Gospel However Dark the Times* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 84-85.

engagement is seeking to be a transforming influence in the world. Guinness' spiritual discernment necessitates an 'in, but not of the world' approach like Christ affirms in John 17. At the same time, the prolific author appeals to believers to be ready for a "courageous refusal" when the culture is distinctly against Christ and the Kingdom of God.<sup>52</sup> When reordered from last to first as presented, the sequence readily aligns with the types offered by Niebuhr.

William Romanowski offers a comparable framework within *Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture* when he lists "three established means of criticism" with the terms "moral, ideological, and theological."<sup>53</sup> At first glance, the terms seem to define dynamics of the same single critique, but the college professor indicates them as three different dynamics. Romanowski goes on to explain how these summarize in a Niebuhr-like manner the different motifs of approaches.<sup>54</sup> The order offered is consistent with the three types that are being highlighted in this section.

In his book *Popcultured: Thinking Christianly about Style, Media, and Entertainment*, Steve Turner takes a systematic look at the different arenas of popular culture. Once his tour of these art forms are complete, Turner concludes with three appeals: consuming discerningly, critiquing faithfully, and creating wisely.<sup>55</sup> "Consuming discerningly" aligns with the first warning of Niebuhr's Type I. Turner reminds, "We're not taking ourselves very seriously if we think we're impervious to the influence of popular culture."<sup>56</sup> "Critiquing faithfully" recognizes

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52. Guinness, *Renaissance*, 85.

53. William Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 106-107.

54. Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Open*, 107.

55. Steve Turner, *Popcultured: Thinking Christianly about Style, Media, and Entertainment* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 223-234.

56. Turner, *Popcultured*, 225.

a role for the Christian engaged in the culture to explain to the secular world the Christian perspective as well as to the Christian realm what is happening in the secular world. “Creating wisely” points to the contribution layer of transformation. Turner advocates for artists to produce work that is “out there with everything else but is somehow different.”<sup>57</sup> The alignment of these three approaches is a clear echo of the triad of Niebuhr’s types.

Walt Mueller simplifies for the sake of argument Niebuhr’s spectrum into three poles: “alienation” on one end, “accommodation” on the other, and a combined term of “infiltration and transformation” within the mediating approach.<sup>58</sup> Although he develops a collective language for it, Mueller’s term “infiltration” acknowledges that there are two realms while “transformation” points by context to the change that is produced through engagement. This step links Niebuhr’s Type IV and Type V into a single proactive approach that is distinct from the extremes.<sup>59</sup> With such terminology, the person pursuing cultural engagement can stress the linked approach without the issues that arise from being limited by a single chorus to sing.

In *The Culturally Savvy Christian*, Dick Staub invites today’s believer in Jesus Christ to stress three approaches: alien, ambassador, and artist.<sup>60</sup> These approaches flow out of the book’s premise that culturally savvy Christians are those “who are serious about faith, savvy about faith and culture, and skilled in relating the two.”<sup>61</sup> The alien approach understands that there will be

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57. Turner, *Popcultured*, 229.

58. W. Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 146-154.

59. W. Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, 136, 146.

60. Dick Staub, *The Culturally Savvy Christian: A Manifesto for Deepening Faith and Enriching Popular Culture in an Age of Christianity-Lite* (San Francisco: Wiley & Sons Press, 2007), 134. After first introducing this shorthand, Staub develops the three terms in the following three chapters.

61. Staub, *Culturally Savvy Christian*, 67, 135, 197. Staub repeats this line to provide framework for the book.

times discernment leads a person to abstain from cultural involvement and in other instances to participate with “selective acculturation.” Staub suggests that the culturally savvy Christian’s path is “neither the cultural glutton nor the cultural anorexic.”<sup>62</sup> The ambassador approach notes the awareness of both the audience of origin and the audience of delivery for content. Staub explains how starting with cultural stories of the audience and working back to the biblical truth can be an effective approach.

The artist approach may be a title that repels some readers at first. Those that conclude that they do not have the capacity to create are missing out on what Staub calls the “seer and revealer” roles.<sup>63</sup> Distinct from alien and ambassador, an artist approach includes identifying

**Table 3. Approaches to Cultural Engagement**

Author	Type I	Type IV	Type V
Niebuhr	“Against”	“Paradox”	“Transforming”
Guinness	courageous refusal	spiritual discernment	purposeful engagement
Romanowski	moral	ideological	theological
Turner	critiquing faithfully	consuming discerningly	creating wisely
Mueller	alienation	infiltration <sup>a</sup>	transformation <sup>a</sup>
Staub	alien	ambassador	artist

*Sources:* Data adapted from H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1952); Os Guinness, *Renaissance: The Power of the Gospel However Dark the Times* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 84-85; William Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Open: Looking for God in Popular Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 106-107; Steve Turner, *Popcultured: Thinking Christianly about Style, Media, and Entertainment* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 223-234; Walt Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture: Bridging Teen Worldviews and Christian Truth*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 146-154; Dick Staub, *The Culturally Savvy Christian: A Manifesto for Deepening Faith and Enriching Popular Culture in an Age of Christianity-Lite* (San Francisco: Wiley & Sons Press, 2007), 134.

<sup>a</sup> Mueller combines “infiltration and transformation” for his description of Niebuhr’s Types IV-V.

62. Staub, *Culturally Savvy Christian*, 151.

63. Staub, *Culturally Savvy Christian*, 184.



cultural pieces and aiding others by showing their meanings. The artist carries awareness of realities presented that the cultural audience has not previously seen or considered. Staub's use of alien, ambassador, and artist taken together is a clear and succinct way to show the three approaches for a volunteer youth leader.

Table 3 shows a summary of approaches to cultural engagement. These authors' reflections are aligned in the ways they parallel the types highlighted by Niebuhr. What does this review provide? It shows a consistent chorus from theologians and practitioners alike. It indicates that the theological traditions that stress Type I keep a priority on the lordship of Jesus Christ. Much akin to the language of I Peter 2:4-9, Christians are a peculiar people. The second column points to the emphasis of Type IV. Reflecting the language of II Corinthians 5:16-21, Christians are ambassadors that hold a citizenship not of this world, while they navigate sharing Jesus in this world. Philippians 3:20-21 offers the same picture of heavenly citizenship. The third column gives consideration to the focus of Type V. In an echo of Ephesians 2:8-10, Christians are saved by grace and are Christ's workmanship. Summarized by lordship, citizenship, and workmanship, these three approaches are accessible for the volunteer youth leader to utilize with teenagers for cultural engagement.

When the volunteer youth leader receives a summary of the biblical approaches to culture, healthy youth ministry and the Kingdom of God advances.

### The Application of Culture

The third challenge is how the volunteer youth leader, within this imagery as a choir director, expresses the text and tunes that have been analyzed and approached. In this way, the teenagers as choir members are directed to apply the text and tunes with their own voices. If

there is a gap between the leader and the choir, then the tune falls flat. When the choir members and the choir director are on the same page, the song is sung in unison. The leader is charged with understanding the need for proper leading, the movement toward effective guidance, and the ownership of the communication process.

## **The Need**

Patty Lane offers a teaching scenario that demonstrates the need for a volunteer youth leader to understand the application within a culture.

I walked into a seminar class as the teacher. I made my introductory remarks in a subdued tone, making eye contact with no one. I used no hand gestures, but rather held my hands straight to my side. After only a few minutes the class made some decisions, based on their culture, about me as a teacher.

Those participants from the U.S.-dominant culture would probably have concluded one or more of the following: I was boring, unprepared, nervous, shy or just an inadequate teacher. However, those who were Laotian would see my behavior differently, concluding that I was a respectful and admirable teacher. Both audiences would have interpreted my behavior through their own cultural lenses.<sup>64</sup>

Everything that the communication environment involves comes into play for the volunteer youth leader, but the common context of what is a “respectful and admirable teacher” will be accessible through cultural awareness.

Today’s American adolescents have been summarized as believing in “God” and yet this belief is in many cases not a distinctly, historic faith. Christian Smith in *Soul Searching* forwards the term Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD) to capture the sense of American adolescents’ belief system.<sup>65</sup> It is moralistic, because there is a recognition of right and wrong. It is

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64. Patty Lane, *A Beginner’s Guide to Crossing Cultures: Making Friends in a Multicultural World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2002), 29.

65. Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 162-170.

therapeutic, because the ultimate goal is happiness, so God should help toward that direction. It is deism, because contrary to many historic traditions of faith, it is general in the teenagers' assessment of the nature of Divinity.<sup>66</sup>

The introduction of this terminology (MTD) gives language that reflects the attitude of “whatever” that is prevalent among today’s teens. Within this reality, Smith brings to light the distance between historic religious teachings and the youth’s expressions of religious tenets, or lack thereof.<sup>67</sup> MTD notes the generalities with which the next generation is speaking of God Almighty. The individualism in which Americans take pride appears to have produced the awful offspring of MTD.

Based on the same research, Kenda Creasy Dean notes the need to recover what she terms “three arts” or three discipleship goals within youth ministry.<sup>68</sup> Dean describes how the American church has lost its focus on what she terms testimony, translation, and detachment, which can be used to see teenagers “cultivating consequential faith.”<sup>69</sup> Of particular note, translation identifies items within the culture and bringing these back into conversation with a theological framework.

Dean offers four guidelines for translating faith with young people, namely the need for translators to be people (in contrast to programs), for them to be bilingual, for them to be imaginative, and for them to be received by those in charge.<sup>70</sup> These guidelines highlight the

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66. Smith with Denton, *Soul Searching*, 163-164.

67. Smith with Denton, *Soul Searching*, 169.

68. Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling Us about the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 99-103.

69. Dean, *Almost Christian*, 106. Dean devotes Chapter 6 to translation, Chapter 7 to testimony, and Chapter 8 to detachment.

70. Dean, *Almost Christian*, 123-129.

elements of bilingual capacity with theology and culture along with creative imagination, which are areas not regularly mentioned in seeking a volunteer youth leader. The opposite of these guidelines are more common. Instead of people, a program is forwarded. Instead of fluidity, a structure is established. When placed in relationship to table 2, Dean's work suggests a mostly existential approach, but it also recognizes a translational aspect to it. The volunteer youth leader could be positioned to identify cultural texts and then intersect them with the translational truths from God's Word.

From the reviewer's tradition, Christian adults being active in the instruction of the young is a historic priority. Arnold C. Mueller explains that "in Luther's opinion the office of Christian teacher, like that of pastor, is one of supreme importance."<sup>71</sup> In *The Ministry of the Lutheran Teacher*, this Mueller sketches the branches of the priesthood of all believers involved in the local congregation and includes a distinct limb for "youth workers."<sup>72</sup> Based on the tradition of Lutheranism, the role of teaching God's Word has high priority and it is the endeavor of all believers in Jesus. Mueller claims, "A church is a teaching church only to the extent that men and women belonging to its fellowship are aware of their priestly responsibility and are engaged in witnessing and teaching."<sup>73</sup> The need is prevalent in the culture and within the Church, so is there a visible movement to flesh out this priority with today's teenagers?

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71. Arnold C. Mueller, *The Ministry of the Lutheran Teacher: A Study to Determine the Position of the Lutheran Parish School Teacher within the Public Ministry of the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), 110.

72. A. C. Mueller, *Lutheran Teacher*, 10.

73. A. C. Mueller, *Lutheran Teacher*, 43.

## The Movement

The National Congregations Study (NCS) final report released in 2015 incorporated numbers from their extensive findings in 2012.<sup>74</sup> Between 1998 and 2012, the median congregation in the United States decreased in total participants (adults and children) from 80 to 70 people and the median congregation's total weekly worship attendance in 2012 was 76.<sup>75</sup> A majority of Christian congregations in the United States are smaller than 100 people in attendance on a Sunday morning, and yet at the same time, a majority of the total number of people are in a congregation larger than that size.<sup>76</sup> It becomes clear that the larger congregations are generating notice from denominations and parachurch organizations, but the fact that the majority of congregations are less than 100 people cannot be overlooked. In the sense of representation among all congregations, the volunteer youth leader is the majority player.

And yet, a preliminary search of Christian bookstores and online resources brings almost no material addressing the volunteer youth leader. Volunteers in youth ministry? Yes, there are numerous resources that target this demographic. Typically, these items address the vocational youth leader recruiting and training adult volunteers for small groups and youth events. But volunteers leading youth ministry? The selections are few.

One author that is giving attention to this dynamic is Stephanie Caro. In her book *99 Thoughts for Small Church Youth Workers*, Caro notes the benefits for the environment of the smaller congregation. The volunteer youth leader has the unique opportunity to visit every teenager at one of their activities as well as to include every teenager in the multi-generational

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74. National Congregations Study (NCS), [http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/Docs/NCSIII\\_report\\_final.pdf](http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/Docs/NCSIII_report_final.pdf), title page summary and acknowledgements, accessed November 30, 2018.

75. NCS, page 6, accessed November 30, 2018.

76. NCS, page 5, accessed November 30, 2018.

activities of the congregation.<sup>77</sup> In addition, Caro explains the important position in the congregation and in the community that the volunteer youth leader can represent. As a veteran consultant on youth ministry, she writes, “We’re standing on the highways and byways of our culture and our communities with an opportunity to be Jesus in less sheltered circumstances. I like the advantage a ‘real world’ job gives me to meet and reach people who might not come through the doors of my church.”<sup>78</sup>

Caro does not conclude that the smaller congregation and volunteer youth leader is a major obstacle. In fact, this leader within youth ministry is determined to highlight that the opposite is true. Caro co-authored a book with Rick Chromey entitled *Thriving Youth Ministry in Smaller Churches: Secrets for Cultivating a Dynamic Youth Ministry*, in which Chromey claims, “Smallness allows the church to react with authenticity, simplicity, and veracity.”<sup>79</sup> Such an attitude could create a powerful application in the smaller congregations and the leaders that serve them. Is it possible that the volunteer youth leader has some advantages over the vocational worker?

Although limited in its appearance in book form, the topic has not escaped the attention of people across religious journals. In the Jewish community, the concept of a volunteer youth instructor is explored. Joan S. Kaye and Debi M. Rowe of the Bureau of Jewish Education tested a communal model in their local synagogue.<sup>80</sup> The authors define “avocational teachers” as those

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77. Stephanie Caro, *99 Thoughts for Smaller Church Youth Workers* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2011), 6-7.

78. Caro, *99 Thoughts*, 10.

79. Rick Chromey and Stephanie Caro, *Thriving Youth Ministry in Smaller Churches* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2009), 17.

80. Joan S. Kaye and Debi M. Rowe, “When Congregants Enter the Classroom: A Communal Model to Prepare Avocational Teachers for Synagogue Schools in Orange County,” *Religious Education* 92, no. 4 (1997): 516.

that offer instruction to children less than six hours per week and see these efforts as “adjunct to the major focus of her/his life.”<sup>81</sup> These individuals did receive some commensurate income for their time, but the priority is motivated by the communication of truths as “an extension and sharing” of their congregational activity.<sup>82</sup>

One telling example of these avocational teachers’ impact was once a class of eighth grade students received instruction about a ‘Shevat seder.’ When introduced to it by avocational teachers, these students could not keep it to themselves. With the aid of the avocational teacher’s arrangements, the eighth graders were positioned to teach what they had learned to a younger grade of children in the school.<sup>83</sup> The authors find, “The program rests on the assumption that congregation members who are excited about their own Jewish learning and their participation in congregational life provide the best source of teachers for their own congregational schools.”<sup>84</sup>

Another effort in this direction within the Jewish community is presented by Sharon Feiman-Nemser in the article, “Teach Them Diligently to Your Children: An Experiment in Avocational Teaching.”<sup>85</sup> This activity at the congregational level led to the employment of “teach teams” that included “2-4 avocational teachers.”<sup>86</sup> The community and collaborative development generated positive momentum, because it led these non-teacher instructors “to see that in order to teach the Torah in an authentic way, they would have to engage with the text

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81. Kaye and Rowe, “When Congregants Enter,” 516.

82. Kaye and Rowe, “When Congregants Enter,” 516, 519.

83. Kaye and Rowe, “When Congregants Enter,” 527.

84. Kaye and Rowe, “When Congregants Enter,” 516.

85. Sharon Feiman-Nemser, “Teach Them Diligently to Your Children: An Experiment in Avocational Teaching,” *Religious Education* 92, no. 4 (1997): 440.

86. Feiman-Nemser, “Teach Them Diligently,” 448.

themselves.”<sup>87</sup> The “team teach avocational” model presents a volunteer method that prioritizes “serious, ongoing teacher learning of content and pedagogy.”<sup>88</sup> Returning to Caro and Chromey, they also acknowledge the limited training that the typical volunteer youth leader holds. They observe, “Many youth workers in the smaller church have little to no biblical education or specialized training in youth ministry.”<sup>89</sup> These examples point out an opportunity through a cooperative approach that could generate the goal of lifetime learners. If properly applied among the adults, this expectation could then be reproduced among the youths that they teach and lead.

For a Roman Catholic example within a rural setting, Leona M. English examines the strategies that emerge from volunteer involvement within “four rural, economically challenged parishes in one diocese.”<sup>90</sup> The learning style of the lay-leaders that developed is summarized as “coaching, mentoring, networking, trial and error, and self-directed.”<sup>91</sup> The results are a ministry-driven movement from the peer relationships that naturally develop within the parish. English comments, “They were also conscious that they sometimes had more in common with the parishioners as laypeople than with the priests.”<sup>92</sup> Although an age difference exists, what if volunteer youth leaders see themselves first as having more in common with this generation of teenagers as fellow laypeople then as leaders? Would it change how they communicate?

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87. Feiman-Nemser, “Teach Them Diligently,” 451.

88. Feiman-Nemser, “Teach Them Diligently,” 457.

89. Chromey and Caro, *Thriving Youth Ministry*, 66.

90. Leona M. English, “Informal and Incidental Teaching Strategies in Lay-Led Parishes,” *Religious Education* 94, no. 3 (1999): 302.

91. English, “Informal and Incidental,” 301.

92. English, “Informal and Incidental,” 309.



The need and the movement are visible for volunteer youth leaders, but how does one shift gears into true ownership of this process?

## **The Ownership**

Reverend Doctor Iain Macritchie begins his article “The Chaplain as Translator” with the case of Flora Nicolson.<sup>93</sup> He tells of his responsibilities at a hospital visiting the patients of which Flora was one. The nurses explained to Macritchie that he would not get a word from her, because she was not responding to anyone. As a chaplain, he ventured into her room to find her as the nurses presented. At which point, Macritchie did not give up:

Then I wondered about her name. ‘Flora Nicolson’ is typically Highland. I thought I would try some Gaelic. I asked her, ‘Flora, a bheil Gaidhlig agaibh?’ (Flora, do you have Gaelic), and to my surprise, she straightened up a little, made eye contact with me for the first time, and said, “Tha, Gaidhlig gu leor!” (Yes, plenty Gaelic).

Flora had been waiting in silence for someone to speak to her in her own language.<sup>94</sup>

How often do teenagers attend their local congregation without being engaged in their own language? The volunteer youth leader has the opportunity to bridge that gap as a cultural translator.

The objection is raised that not every believer is ready for engaging people in general and not with adolescents specifically. Should not this engagement be left to the professional pastoral leadership? Although preparation is an element to be considered, Uche Anizor and Hank Voss suggest that this line of thinking has reduced the effectiveness of today’s local congregation. They contend, “In some Protestant circles the term *ministry* has been limited to a practice

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93. Iain Macritchie, “The Chaplain as Translator,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 40, no. 1 (2001): 205.

94. Macritchie, “The Chaplain as Translator,” 205-206.

performed exclusively by the clergy or leadership of the church. This reductionist understanding of the practice of ministry has caused great harm to a faithful performance of the royal priesthood.”<sup>95</sup>

Anizor and Voss combat the misunderstanding of this reductionist view. They both recognize the narrow definition of pastoral leadership ministry and stress the needed broad definition of the priesthood of all believers. They proclaim, “Every-member ministry is a vital practice of the royal priesthood.”<sup>96</sup> The modern congregation would benefit from releasing the thought, ‘If you are a leader, then you have a ministry,’ and embracing the biblical perspective, ‘If you are a member, then you have a ministry.’ The volunteer youth leader exemplifies this vision in action.

What then could such a leader prioritize in relationship to cultural engagement? A framework for presenting a biblical worldview would assist the volunteer youth leader. Such a language would bridge to the cultural texts of today’s teenagers. Albert Wolters’ work *Creation Regained* offers a direct summary of “central realities” with the terms “creation, fall, and redemption.”<sup>97</sup> These three can be connected to the reflection that the final reality of Christ’s redemption is restoration.<sup>98</sup> The four terms taken together provide “a way of the framing” the questions that cultural texts bring to our attention.<sup>99</sup> With this step, the volunteer youth leader has a language for entering into cultural engagement.

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95. Uche Anizor and Hank Voss, *Representing Christ: A Vision for the Priesthood of All Believers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 139. Italics emphasis original.

96. Anizor and Voss, *Representing Christ*, 139.

97. Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 87.

98. Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 131.

99. Wolters, *Creation Regained*, 115.

A final question comes into the area of ownership by the volunteer leader. How does the congregation and pastoral leadership invite this type of engagement? In their joint article “The Rabbinic Leader and the Volunteer Leader,” Rabbi Stuart Kelman and Alison Jordan describe how they have found the needed space and ownership within their synagogue.<sup>100</sup> The picture is of the established leader, in this instance the rabbi, not serving in such a way that brings “filling of all space.”<sup>101</sup> When the congregational leader is the one answering every question and filling every gap, then the room for the contribution of others is reduced. In contrast, a spiritual leader that invites space for the congregation to contribute extends them “dignity,” or in another light, the leader is “ready to work, guide, and assist people in their chosen roles, but not to do the work for them.”<sup>102</sup> Thus, pastoral leadership has the potential of being either a hindrance by doing the work of the congregation or being an advocate for volunteer workers.

This ownership directs a path toward the spiritual growth of the Kingdom worker. This duo highlights, “The rabbi is no longer the priest or public performer, but more of a facilitator and teacher. The rabbi needs to contract his or her ego in order to assist in the growth of the congregant.”<sup>103</sup> When this ownership is shared in a Christian congregation, as a valued application of the priesthood of all believers and as an active pursuit of the pastor, the volunteer youth leader ownership follows.

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100. Rabbi Stuart Kelman and Alison Jordan, “The Rabbinic Leader and the Volunteer Leader,” *Religious Education* 97, no. 4 (2002): 322. Portions of the article were penned by the rabbi and a portion was written by the volunteer.

101. Kelman and Jordan, “The Rabbinic Leader,” 325.

102. Kelman and Jordan, “The Rabbinic Leader,” 326.

103. Kelman and Jordan, “The Rabbinic Leader,” 333.

The need, the movement, and the ownership are all within the grasp of the volunteer youth leader. It is in the healthy, biblical congregation that all believers are invited to invest their gifts for the benefit of the whole local body, including today's teenagers. The pastoral leadership has the capacity to make "space" for them. If so applied, it could lead to a revolution of effective youth ministry through the volunteer youth leader.

What can be expected? Could a role that has been categorically overlooked really be a key ingredient for healthy change? Within the sub-heading entitled "Surprising Reversals," author Os Guinness reminds that it is not always the expected voice that is the needed voice:

So we are always ready for the surprising voice, the far-from-obvious leader, the last-person-you-would-ever-think would be the key player. And yes, we are always ready to recognize God's nobodies and God's fools. For these may be the truly anointed ones prepared to be seen and treated as nobodies and fools for Christ's sake, **whom God uses far more** than we who are the obvious ones for God to use.<sup>104</sup>

With confidence in Jesus Christ, may the tribe of volunteer youth leaders be exactly whom God uses far more for Christ's Kingdom!

## Conclusion

When H. Richard Niebuhr began his reflections on culture, he offered the heading "Toward the Definition of Culture."<sup>105</sup> This wording is not lost on the reader. The steps taken within this chapter are to point to the challenge and the opportunity involved when wrestling with culture. The challenge includes understanding how to provide cultural analysis and to comprehend the approach to it as a follower of Jesus Christ. The opportunity remains for

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104. Guinness, *Renaissance*, 107. Emphasis added.

105. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 29.

Christians in general, and the volunteer youth leader specifically, to enter into cultural engagement in a consistent, Christ-honoring, and Word-informed way.

Within the heading of “Theology of Culture,” Niebuhr and more modern writers highlight the spectrum of responses and grant language to the assessment of how believers in Jesus intersect with culture. While the analysis, the approach, and the application of culture have been considered, it is the link between them which produces insight for the volunteer youth leader. Analysis alone does not lead to conversations with teenagers. Approach sharpening without application is equally impotent. The breadth and depth of cultural considerations bring into view the need for a compact method for touching on all three areas.

Within the literary review, a common set of approaches rise to the surface. A number of the authors express the triad of approaches with creativity and insight. With a mind’s eye on the volunteer youth leader, Staub’s language of alien, ambassador, and artist appears most tangible to utilize in working with teenagers. Dean’s language calling for caring, believing adults to be translators can also be applied to the volunteer youth leader.

When combined with the theological chapter, the literary review has positioned the reviewer for developing one’s own tools, which is also the goal of this student for the purpose of effective youth ministry. In the context of guarding against what he terms “cultural accommodation,” Romanowski acknowledges his goal to “convince readers of the importance of developing rigorous tools for analysis of popular art and culture.”<sup>106</sup> This compelling principle informs the direction of this research. The next step is for a tool to be developed with the volunteer youth leader in focus.

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<sup>106</sup> Romanowski, *Eyes Wide Open*, 220.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ONE TOOL FOR CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT

#### **Introduction**

Chapter two explores content, its importance, and the role of a volunteer youth leader in sharing it. The biblical, historical, and systematic areas demonstrate the authority of God's Word and the legitimacy of the priesthood of all believers. Chapter three examines culture in terms of theological considerations and practical implications. The volunteer youth leader has a prime position as one sitting at the crossroads of Scriptural content and the local cultural understanding. The broader youth culture may provide many puzzles for the volunteer youth leader, but these could be unlocked with a productive tool.

This chapter will pursue the development of one tool for cultural engagement. This work will cover the task of the tool's development, instrumentation, and a subsequent review related to pre-tool and post-tool surveying of those that work with teenagers.

#### **Developing the Tool**

The biblical examination combined with the literary review bring forward the perspectives needed for the formation for a tool targeting cultural engagement. What has been gleaned from the content of biblical truth, the study of the priesthood of all believers, and the considerations of culture will influence the shaping of this tool, while at the same time keeping

the primary effort in the hands of a volunteer youth leader. This section will explore the Scriptural, theological, and contextual guidance that influences the tool.

### Scriptural Guidance

Theologian John Stott explains, “God wants his people to become like Christ, for Christlikeness is the will of God for the people of God.”<sup>1</sup> Since Christlikeness is the target for the child of God through faith in Jesus, then the object of that faith is the bullseye. Examining the Person and work of Jesus Christ is the center of all the Bible. In this way, all the Scriptures in one sense could be considered here. Accepting that the entire Holy Bible is too broad of a scope, what passage presents Jesus, the Church, and the world in direct interaction? In looking at the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, two passages are significantly instructive in beginning to develop a tool for a volunteer youth leader. Matthew 5 holds a portion of the teaching commonly referred to as the “Sermon on the Mount” and Matthew 22 records the exchange of the Savior King on the Greatest Commandment.

The “Sermon on the Mount” shows Jesus explaining himself, the disciples observing, and the people of the world listening.<sup>2</sup> An objection may come that this section is primarily law, and as such, it is inadequate to provide guidance in framing a cultural tool. Dietrich Bonhoeffer indicates that the Beatitudes and sections to follow demonstrate, “It is Jesus himself who comes between the disciples and the law, not the law which comes between Jesus and the disciples.

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1. John R. W. Stott, *The Radical Disciple: Some Neglected Aspects of Our Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 29.

2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone Publishing, 1995), 105-106.

They find their way to the law through the cross of Christ.”<sup>3</sup> The Deliverer has sacrificed himself and rose again. His teaching is to be heard, received, and lived. Bonhoeffer continues that “the disciples now learn that genuine adherence to Christ also means adherence to the law of God,” which is in significant contrast to this world’s ideas.<sup>4</sup>

What is found within the contents of the “Sermon on the Mount” to provide guidance in this dynamic between God’s people and the world’s activity? Matthew 5:21-48 records six instances of Jesus appealing to the crowds with something that they have heard in their world.<sup>5</sup> “You have heard that it was said,” begins and repeats the Savior King. The first three instances are quotes from the law of the Old Testament: verse 21 references Exodus 20:13 on murder, verse 27 points to Exodus 20:14 on adultery, and verse 31 quotes Deuteronomy 24:1 on divorce. In this trio, Jesus starts with God’s law and then highlights their misunderstanding of the content.

The second three occasions are also Scriptural content in verses 33, 38, and 43, but the quotations are adaptations. What the people had become familiar with in these three instances were a cultural text forwarded as if it was scripture. The English Standard Version does not offer a cross-reference for verse 33.<sup>6</sup> Any person that has heard the American proverb that indicates “God helps them who help themselves” is familiar with this phenomena. Jesus identifies the

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3. Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 123.

4. Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 123.

5. Matthew 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43.

6. The Holy Bible, *English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishing, 2001; ESV Text Edition of Matthew 5:33 and footnote, 2016), 634.

A close approximation could be Deuteronomy 23:21-22, “If you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay fulfilling it, for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and you will be guilty of sin. But if you refrain from vowing, you will not be guilty of sin.”

If this passage from the Pentateuch was what the cultural text of the day was based on, then Jesus stresses here what the Deuteronomy text taught, namely, that the point is not about the vow but about the fact that we live before the great King that hears all vows and intentions, so the vow is not needed.



problem of such an adaption, and redirects to living before the Living Lord. In verse 38, the concept of an eye for an eye is repeated from Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21. And yet, Jesus includes it as an example of confusion in the culture. Instead of an explanation of accountability in the Pentateuch, the cultural story concluded it was a way to get back at their neighbor, which led to the needed correction by the Son of God. Verse 43 begins with the Scriptural concept of “love your neighbor,” but it is saddled with the idea of “hate your enemy.” The God of all creation is not calling his people to hate other people created in His image. Jesus brings into light the ways in which scripture has been twisted or ignored within the culture.

The purpose of the Savior King is not simply one of identifying facts. For these six instances in Matthew 5, each time the recall of “you have heard it said” is listed, Jesus moves forward with contrasting it with the true meaning and fulfillment of the law. The Author of Life illumines the truth, in order that his disciples understand living in the world, and this world understands they are not living by his truth. Bonhoeffer draws attention to the contrast, “Between the disciples and the better righteousness demanded of them stands the Person of Christ, who came to fulfil the law of the old covenant.”<sup>7</sup>

Taken together, these verses in Matthew 5 demonstrate an approach for cultural engagement that can be adapted for modern use. First, Jesus acknowledged what was familiar. In some instances, it was truth from scripture itself. In at least one instance, it was a cultural twist on God’s truth. This first layer of cultural engagement necessitates awareness of the common views of a particular people group. Starting with what people already know enabled the

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7. Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, 122.

conversation to begin. Second, Jesus funneled to what was true. The explanations offered highlighted the distinction between what was familiar and what was reality from God's perspective. Third, Jesus applied what was true to their lives. The repetition of the conditional "if" in some of Christ's expansions points to the application level for the hearer.<sup>8</sup> A tool for cultural translation will be most effective if the contrast of the world's wisdom and God's Wisdom are set side by side for the reviewer to examine, just as the Savior King did.

Another instance in which Jesus Christ, his disciples, and the world come into expressed conversation in the gospel accounts is Matthew 22:34-40. One lawyer from the religious teachers of the world asks Jesus which is the greatest commandment. The timing is significant. Jesus and his disciples are in Jerusalem after the triumphal entry at the beginning of Matthew 21. The end of this historical week will be the Son of God going to the cross, dying in our place, and raising again on Easter Sunday. The fullness of time is at hand. The beginning of chapter 22 has Jesus teaching in parables. People from the crowds are posing the Savior King questions, when the lawyer offers his inquiry to Jesus. Matthew 22:36 records, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

Jesus' response is instructive. Matthew 22:37-38 states, "And he said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.'" The next two verses point to the love of neighbor and how these summarize all the Law and the Prophets. The link between Matthew 5 and Matthew 22 is seen here. The law is distilled into loving the Lord and loving one's neighbor, and the Savior King is fulfilling it all. The answer Jesus gives to the question draws our attention to heart, soul,

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8. "If" is included in the English translation of Matthew 5:23, 29, 30, 39, 40, 41, 46, and 47. Multiple instances occur within more than one section indicating that Jesus offers multiple applications of the truths revealed.

and mind. In modern contextual view, the heart is placed in relationship to one's feelings, the soul with one's beliefs, and the mind with one's thoughts. A tool for cultural engagement that explores what a person feels, believes, and thinks will build a bridge to the listener.

### Theological Guidance

Bringing forward the work of chapter two on content and the literature review of chapter three on culture, theological guidance will narrow here to three specific contributions. First, Kenda Creasy Dean in *Almost Christian* makes the appeal for translation by adults working with today's teenagers.<sup>9</sup> Dean offers these "Guidelines for Translating Faith with Young People":

1. The best translators are people, not programs.
2. The best translators are bilingual.
3. The best translators invoke imagination.
4. Translation can threaten the people in charge.<sup>10</sup>

The volunteer youth leader is a person who knows the content of scripture and the context of the community. This caring, believing adult has the capacity to creatively express "the language of the dominant culture and the language of the church."<sup>11</sup> A volunteer youth leader can speak in terms drawing from both the youth culture and the congregational culture. These connections can be seen as threatening to the broader congregational leadership, but if properly appraised of the goal for sharing the gospel of Jesus with today's teenagers, the objections should be reduced. If the volunteer youth leader is to be a cultural translator, then these adults will adopt their role to

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9. Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling Us about the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 109-130. Dean addresses translation in Chapter 6.

10. Dean, *Almost Christian*, 123. The "Guidelines" are offered in this numbered-style listing within the text. Pages 123 through 129 expand on each of the four guidelines.

11. Dean, *Almost Christian*, 127.

bridge between adolescents and adults, between the world and the Word, even if the status quo is challenged.

Second, Albert Wolters in *Creation Regained* points to the summary of scripture as creation, fall, redemption, restoration.<sup>12</sup> When the volunteer youth leader translates God's Story, these four categories will assist the description. Along these lines, biblical chapter benchmarks can provide the leader needed Scriptural context for these terms. Many Scriptural chapters could be associated with each of the four terms, but for the tool's use, a single chapter will be featured. Creation can start with Genesis 1, which provides an essential view of God, humanity, and the world. Fall can link to Genesis 3, which points to the reality of original sin, actual sin, and sin's consequences. Luke 24 will be used for the section of redemption, because of its record of the resurrection, the disciples encountering the risen Christ, and Jesus retelling how he is the center of scripture with forgiveness and new life. Lastly, Revelation 21 marks restoration in the tool, in order to cover the consummation picture for teenagers. The sequence of Genesis 1, Genesis 3, Luke 24, and Revelation 21 provides a scripture-long measuring stick for assessment and spiritual conversations.

Third, Dick Staub in *The Culturally Savvy Christian* makes the case for the believer's application of faith as alien, ambassador, and artist.<sup>13</sup> Chapter three includes the literary efforts of many authors with their terminology linking to Niebuhr's types,<sup>14</sup> but Staub's language has

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12. Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 87.

13. Dick Staub, *The Culturally Savvy Christian: A Manifesto for Deepening Faith and Enriching Popular Culture in an Age of Christianity-Lite* (San Francisco: Wiley & Sons Press, 2007), 134. After first introducing this shorthand, Staub develops the three terms in the following three chapters.

14. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1952), Introduction xliii-lv. Table 1 summarizes Niebuhr's types in a spectrum.

been chosen for its straightforward nature and its accessibility for both the volunteer youth leader and teenagers. The alien approach links to Niebuhr's "Christ Against Culture" and reflects the lordship of Christ. The ambassador stance indicates Niebuhr's "Christ and Culture in Paradox" and points to the citizenship in Christ. The artist effort demonstrates Niebuhr's "Christ Transforming Culture" and echoes the workmanship of Christ. Biblical chapter references to these terms will be I Peter 2, II Corinthians 5, and Ephesians 2, respectively.

Dean's work with translators, Wolters' summary of scripture, and Staub's terms for cultural engagement will shape sections of the tool. The framework of the tool in this sequence begins with the world (a cultural text), works back to the Word (a biblical text), and ends in personal application, which positions the volunteer youth leader for cultural translation.

### Contextual Guidance

The world of the teenager has been considered in building the tool, but not without giving attention to the world of the volunteer youth leader. Chapter three demonstrated that the major publishing efforts in the United States give very little print to the volunteer youth leader, especially in the smaller congregational setting. Stephanie Caro is one author that has addressed this situation. She notes in her book *99 Thoughts for Smaller Church Youth Workers* the opportunities afforded to the volunteer youth leader.<sup>15</sup> The one that serves the median-sized American congregation of 76 worship attendees can know the adolescents well and point them

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15. Stephanie Caro, *99 Thoughts for Smaller Church Youth Workers* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2011), 10.

faithfully to the truths of Jesus Christ.<sup>16</sup> With this opportunity, the profile of a leader benefits from flexibility. In *Thriving Youth Ministry in Smaller Congregations* with Rick Chromey, Caro makes the case for adaptability in many areas of volunteer youth ministry, from the scheduling of events to the limiting of resources.<sup>17</sup> In the same way, a tool for cultural engagement must be developed with flexibility and adaptability. The report of a rabbi and lay leader together reminds that if the tool fills all “the space” for the one that is to utilize it, then the tool will limit the benefit.<sup>18</sup> The tool being developed for cultural engagement will be constructed to maximize flexibility, adaptability, and accessibility.

With the Scriptural, theological, and contextual guidance listed above, the tool was framed as a single-page, front and back document. The first draft attempted to incorporate all concepts on the front of a single, letter-sized piece of paper. With recognition that the tool is attempting to show the distinction between the world’s message and the Word’s message, the division of these pieces to front and back offers a strong opportunity to make a clear delineation. The world’s message on the front and the Word’s message on the back strengthens the tool’s clarity for the user.

The front page engages assessment on the cultural text through the lens of Matthew 5 and Matthew 22. The back page begins with the contributions of Wolters, moves through biblical discernment, and ends in the categories of Staub for application. The tool seeks to employ the

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16. National Congregations Study (NCS), [http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/Docs/NCSIII\\_report\\_final.pdf](http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/Docs/NCSIII_report_final.pdf), title page summary and acknowledgements, accessed November 30, 2018.

17. Rick Chromey and Stephanie Caro, *Thriving Youth Ministry in Smaller Churches* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2009), 17.

18. Rabbi Stuart Kelman and Alison Jordan, “The Rabbinic Leader and the Volunteer Leader,” *Religious Education* 97, no. 4 (2002): 325. Portions of the article were penned by the rabbi and a portion was written by the volunteer.

guidelines offered by Dean on translators. The design for both sides incorporates boxes of blank space to encourage reflecting on concepts, journaling ideas of assessment, and making connections for communication with teenagers.

### **Instrumentation of the Tool**

A pilot draft of the tool was reviewed by a few select volunteer and vocational colleagues in youth ministry during the summer and fall seasons of 2018. Suggestions received addressed visual presentation and clarity of description. Small adaptations brought the tool to its presentation form in the first half of 2019 for the purpose of the project.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Initial Survey**

Once a revised tool was established, a pre-tool survey of potential participants was developed. The initial survey used Google Docs for an online set of 35 questions.<sup>20</sup> The survey was divided into four sections: A) “Your Context,” B) “Youth Culture,” C) “Youth Ministry,” and D) “Your Demographics.” The questions are numbered within each section to align purpose with the survey line. For instance, B2 is a survey line in the section of “Youth Culture” and it represents the second question within that section.

The first section on “Your Context” identifies if the respondent was volunteer or vocational leader, the number of hours invested weekly in the role, and the theological

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19. “One Tool for Cultural Engagement” can be found in Appendix A.

20. The initial survey was entitled, “Survey for AFLC Youth Leaders,” and it can be found in Appendix B.

perspective of their congregation. The next section on “Youth Culture” looks at attitudes about the influences of today’s youth culture on the teenagers that they serve. The third section on “Youth Ministry” explores opinions on the crossroads of content from God’s Word and culture from teenagers’ world. This section also introduces the application concepts of lordship, citizenship, and workmanship. The last section of “Your Demographics” addresses the common statistical measures of age, gender, and years of congregational service.

The survey was sent on June 18, 2019, with a target of completion included by the end of June. The survey was emailed by use of the business class service MailChimp to 414 adults that indicate to the national youth ministries’ department that they are volunteer or vocational youth leaders in the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC). On July 1, 2019, sixty-one surveys were fully completed.

Because the survey was sent in the two weeks preceding FLY, the national youth gathering of the AFLC,<sup>21</sup> it was anticipated that some volunteers in this period would have been attending to their group’s arrangements for the convention over attending to their email inbox. Identical paper copies of the survey were provided to interested attendees that came to a session led by this student on youth ministry.<sup>22</sup> Six individuals completed the paper survey and turned it in within this setting. These six paper surveys were inputted into the online survey to catalogue all responses in the same format. The final six brought the total initial survey responses to 67.

The initial survey results indicated a high value of scripture in youth ministry, an awareness of youth culture’s influence, and a mixed response on engaging teenagers within

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21. The AFLC holds a national youth gathering in July of the odd numbered years. This event carries the name “FLY Convention®” with FLY standing as an abbreviation for Free Lutheran Youth.

22. Appendix B.



youth culture.<sup>23</sup> The high value of scripture in youth ministry was evident in both the section on youth culture and youth ministry. Survey Line B1 found 60 out of 67 respondents “Strongly Agree” with the statement, “God’s Word is instructive to speak truth to today’s youth culture.” Similarly, Survey Line C1 received 50 “Strongly Agree” and 15 “Agree” to the statement, “For effective youth ministry in our congregation, the communication of God’s Word with teenagers is a high priority.” Respondents saw the Bible as vital for healthy youth ministry.

The awareness of youth culture was seen in multiple responses. Survey Line B5 stated, “I understand that specific beliefs witnessed among teenagers in my setting are a result of today’s youth culture.” Out of the same 67, this inquiry brought results of 26 “Strongly Agree” and 34 “Agree.” In a parallel tone, Survey Line C4 indicated, “For effective youth ministry in our congregation, connecting with today’s youth culture and leading teenagers to view these through a biblical lens is a high priority.” The responses to this inventory line were 40 “Strongly Agree” and 18 “Agree.” In summary, survey respondents were willing to acknowledge a consistent influence from today’s youth culture on the teenagers that they walked alongside of while seeking to point them to Jesus.

Would these two trends lead to an expressed desire for cultural engagement? In some of the most intriguing findings from the initial survey, respondents were very mixed. Some kept a high concern for this trajectory of cultural engagement. Survey Line B10 stated, “I would expect that if a teenager brought an aspect of today’s youth culture to me that I would be equipped to build a bridge to God’s Word from the cultural question.” This line received one of the largest combined affirmative scores in the survey: 61 out of 67 between “Strongly Agree” and “Agree.”

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23. Appendix C. The 35 questions are graphed for visual summary. The comments in this section are reflections on the trends within the surveying instrument.

At the same time, the breakdown of these responses showed some hesitation: 17 “Strongly Agree” and 44 “Agree.” Survey Line C13 indicated, “My approach to youth ministry includes engaging with today's youth culture for the sake of teenagers in my setting.” The responses here received some of the largest totals for “Neutral” at eleven and “Disagree” at six.

Survey Line C15 inquired, “Cultural engagement of today's youth culture from a biblical perspective is a high priority in our congregational setting.” C15 received 11 “Strongly Agree,” 33 “Agree,” 17 “Neutral,” five “Disagree,” and one “Strongly Disagree.” If respondents were consistent with being prepared to address cultural questions, then why is there such a spectrum of activity on their confidence with cultural engagement? Other factors certainly can influence the congregation’s priorities in youth ministry, but to encapsulate these responses faithfully, one is left to categorize respondents’ answers as diverse across the entire spectrum.

Regarding the exploratory areas of lordship, citizenship, and workmanship, the responses demonstrated the tension between faith and practice, between what is taught and what is lived. Survey Lines C5 and C6 address the area of lordship. C5 mentions the spiritually growing teenagers “understanding” lordship, which received 20 “Strongly Agree” and 34 “Agree” with the statement. C6 indicates evidence of the teenagers living this lordship, which had 21 “Strongly Agree” and 36 “Agree.” Taken together, the respondents see teenagers in their context living under the lordship of Jesus Christ slightly more than understanding it.

Survey Lines C7 and C8 tackle the area of citizenship. C7 lists the spiritually growing teenagers “understanding” citizenship, which found 17 “Strongly Agree” and 33 “Agree.” The next line of C8 brought the parallel assessment of living as a citizen of Christ’s Kingdom. For C8, 10 “Strongly Agree” and 37 “Agree” suggesting that the confidence reduces when

affirmative responses are contrasted. Respondents are more certain teenagers conceptually understood citizenship than lived in this reality.

Survey Lines C9 and C10 step into the area of workmanship. C9 describes the spiritually growing teenagers “understanding” workmanship, which was marked 14 “Strongly Agree” and 37 “Agree.” For comparison, C10 states teenagers living as God’s workmanship, which received 11 “Strongly Agree” and 36 “Agree.” This sequence points in the direction of more value being found in affirming what is true than in living what is true. This set was the only one among the three terms that both the “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” categories declined. In light of Ephesians 2:10, it is highly likely that the area of being God’s workmanship is worth exploring further in demonstration.

### The Presentation of the Tool

The developed tool was presented at an elective session for youth leaders during FLY, the national youth gathering of the AFLC, on July 4, 2019. The session was entitled, “One Tool for Cultural Engagement.” During the 45-minutes provided, the rationale for each section of the tool was explained and three examples of how to utilize the tool were demonstrated. The explanation of the tool highlighted the Scriptural, theological, and contextual elements that were built into it. The three examples of utilization moved from broader common cultural activity to a more specific cultural text for teenagers.

On July 26, 2019, the tool was emailed as an Adobe PDF extension to the 67 participants in the initial survey. This email correspondence once again utilized MailChimp for one uniform delivery system. The introductory paragraph explained the purpose of the tool and offered an

invitation to use it in conversations or teaching environments with teenagers. The email's offer reflected the verbal expression made during the session earlier in the month at the national youth gathering. This later email communication piece also highlighted that a follow-up survey would be coming in the month of September.

### The Follow-Up Survey

The date of September 10, 2019, was selected for the release of the follow-up survey, which represented ten weeks after the tool was presented at the national youth gathering and seven weeks after it was emailed to survey participants as an Adobe PDF.

The follow-up survey was conducted via Google Docs and email distribution through MailChimp to the 67 respondents of the initial tool. The email distribution noted in the email release and in the survey introduction a goal of September 23, 2019, for the survey completion. On September 23, 2019, the post-tool survey had generated 28 responses. Among those with incomplete surveys by the deadline, a follow-up email in groups of four or five people by their connections (known friendships and regional geography) was issued with a request of final submission by an extended deadline of September 30, 2019. On September 30, the total follow-up survey respondents had climbed to 45.<sup>24</sup>

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24. A 46<sup>th</sup> survey respondent emailed a reply indicating that since he had recently retired, he did not have additional insights to offer beyond his first survey results.

The follow-up survey had 35 survey lines.<sup>25</sup> The categories paralleled those used in the pre-tool survey in order to discern comparisons and contrasts, but it also included areas of open field answers for unguided feedback on the tool.

### **The Review of the Tool**

The post-tool survey included four sections, which paralleled the initial survey: A) “Your Context,” B) “Youth Culture,” C) “Youth Ministry,” and D) “Your Evaluation.” The sections of B and C provided the identical questions from the initial survey. Any substantive differences over the duration of the project will be evident in reviewing survey line to survey line. Sections B and C will be reviewed in the broader trends in the next portion of this chapter.

Section A asked survey lines in relationship to the tool. A2 inquired, “In how many instances since July did this tool influence your conversations with teenagers?” Over half of respondents (24 out of 45) indicated that it had influenced their interactions, with 14 of the total being impacted two or more times in this period. Survey line A5 stated, “How frequently could you see yourself utilizing this tool for youth ministry efforts in the future?” Almost two-thirds of respondents (29 out of 45) envisioned using this tool for cultural engagement on a quarterly basis or more frequently in their youth ministry setting.

Section D investigated the respondents’ evaluation of the tool. Survey line D1 asked, “What are the strongest pieces of this tool? (Select up to 3).” The following list in D1 offered

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25. Appendix D and E. Appendix D is the post-tool survey. Appendix E shows the 35 questions graphed for visual summary. The comments in this section are reflections on the trends within this surveying instrument.

areas based on the tool's sequential components with the number of respondents selecting that area as one of the strongest pieces:

- 14 marked “To name the cultural statement to be examined (identification)”
- 23 marked “To consider how cultural texts influence teenagers (feel, think, do)”
- 8 marked “To examine the results of the cultural stories (belief)”
- 22 marked “To examine the guidance from Scripture on cultural stories (creation, fall, redemption, restoration)”
- 21 marked “To consider how Scripture links to these influences (biblical discernment)”
- 14 marked “To name the biblical statement which responds to the cultural text (condensing to a reply)”
- 17 marked “To explore the biblical applications (alien, ambassador, artist)”

The selections indicate three tiers of priorities. The highest commonality in responses (23, 22, and 21) isolates the influence of cultural texts and the examination of scripture. The respondents concluded that cultural influence, biblical expression, and biblical discernment claimed the first layer of value. This perspective stresses the world's view and the Word's truth. The next tier of responses (17, 14, and 14) represents an extension from the first tier. The identification of the cultural statement, the scriptural response to the cultural influences, and the biblical applications follow next for the respondents. Once the cultural text is seen, the biblical reply and triple application of alien, ambassador, and artist are employed.

The last tier of responses by frequency trailed the other two tiers. It is noteworthy that only 8 respondents of the 45 included, “To examine the results of the cultural stories (belief).” The reasons for the lowest reply rate within this survey line are not clear. One potential explanation would be that the nature of cultural engagement does not prioritize dwelling on the ways in which cultural stories are impacting today's American adolescents. It is also reasonable to expect that this piece proved more valuable to some than others based on the level of importance for the individual on making this direct corresponding comparison. Some people

value putting the apple alongside the orange, but others anticipate that the distinction between the fruit is self-evident. Parallel to one's priority on the applications of alien, ambassador, and artist, respondents may want to stand separate from examining the results of the cultural stories, to stay on task for the Kingdom of God perspective, or to steer into methods of creating change.

Survey line D2 inquired, "Which of the following roles and relationships may benefit from this tool? (Select all that apply)." The categories listed within the survey were volunteer youth leader, paid youth leader, parents of teenagers, pastor, and teacher (Sunday School, Confirmation, etc.). An open field "Other" was provided, if the respondent had additional roles to add to this discussion. In order of their frequency, the list of categories and number of responses in parenthesis are pastor (37), volunteer youth leader (35), parents of teenagers (34), teacher (34), and paid youth leader (33). Three "Other" fields listed a single response for "Other teens," "Adults in the congregation," and an indication of not remembering seeing the tool. The degree of differential is very small among respondents, but it is significant to note that pastor (37) surpassed volunteer youth leader (35) for the primary roles to employ the tool by respondents. It is also worth observing that both parents of teens (34) and those that instruct teenagers in God's Word (34) held an equally strong consideration for respondents. In addition, the vocational youth leader (33) may also be an important role for employing tools of cultural engagement based on the respondents' thoughts. Although it has been designed with an eye on the volunteer youth leader, the tool may have useful application for many other caring, believing adults that walk alongside teenagers.

Survey line D3 posed the question, "What is your primary suggestion for sharpening this tool?" This survey line was not a required field. Twenty-four out of the forty-five respondents filled in content on this open field within the survey. From a brief phrase to a full paragraph,

respondent feedback fit four categories: instructions, design, relationships, and no additional changes. The most common category was instructions. Ten respondents expressed the need for more information on how to utilize the tool. One respondent explained, “It needs more instruction. Got confused on the second page in regard to how to use it.” The next three categories were similar in their frequency. Design (6 instances) was a concern on visually tracking through the tool, while relationships (4 times) were in view for linking the adults to the teenagers they seek to serve. Four respondents indicated not having a suggestion. In order for the tool’s effectiveness to be increased, additional instructions including a full example and increased design elements may be an important component for the tool’s future distribution.

### Trends over Both Surveys

A brief evaluation can be made of the movement on respondents’ perspectives, or lack thereof, within the surveying upon the completion of the post-tool survey. The survey sections designated as B and C included the identical questions for the initial survey and the final survey. The ten survey lines in B and the fifteen survey lines in C were presented in the same order and wording for the respondents to consider. A comparison between the two sets of results may highlight ways in which the tool contributed to the thinking of these leaders.

Many responses in these two sections reflected a consistent view between the pre-tool and post-tool survey. Survey line B3 stated, “God's Word is directive to Christ's mission engaging within today's youth culture.” In the pre-tool results, 51 out of 67 indicated “Strongly Agree” with another 13 marking “Agree.” The post-tool results for the same survey line posted 35 out of 45 “Strongly Agree” and an additional 6 “Agree.” Survey line C1 claimed, “For



effective youth ministry in our congregation, the communication of God's Word with teenagers is a high priority.” The pre-tool survey among 67 individuals found 50 “Strongly Agree” and 15 “Agree.” After the tool was introduced, the follow-up survey reflecting 45 people showed 34 “Strongly Agree” and 8 “Agree.” These answers pointed to a steady position among respondents about the Bible and youth ministry.

Some survey lines point to a combination of growing confidence and growing awareness within the same responses. Survey line B4 read, “I understand that specific beliefs witnessed among teenagers in my setting are a result of today's youth culture.” On the side of growing confidence, the respondents that marked “Strongly Agree” moved from 26 out of 67 in the pre-survey to a greater percentage of 22 out of 45 in the post-survey. Within the same inventory line, the number of results that marked “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” grew from one reply to three. These respondents are most likely aware of other factors in adolescents’ beliefs. Survey line B10 stated, “I would expect that if a teenager brought an aspect of today's youth culture to me that I would be equipped to build a bridge to God's Word from the cultural question.” Respondents’ views started at 17 out of 67 “Strongly Agree” and grew to 15 out of 45, while for the same line 44 out of 67 “Agreed” to begin and shifted to 26 out of 45. These numbers reflect both an increase in the portion for “Strongly Agree” and a decrease in the segment for “Agree.” At the same time, the responses for this survey line marked “Disagree” and “Strongly Disagree” increased from one to two for that statement. Survey line C15 expressed, “Cultural engagement of today's youth culture from a biblical perspective is a high priority in our congregational setting.” The amount of “Strongly Agree” moved from 11 out of 67 to a greater portion of 11 out of 45, while “Agree” remained similar in percentage near half of each set of respondents. The sample representatives that together marked “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” shifted from 6

out of 67 to larger portion 7 out of 45. In one of the largest single shifts within the survey, the percent of “Neutral” on this survey line began at 17 out of 67, and decreased in the post-survey to 4 out of 45. The cultural engagement tool appears to have made some leaders more confident in their capacity to engage teenagers on youth culture, while others are made more sensitive to their own weakness in addressing this area. The tool generally has directed people to a firmer assessment, whether one that is stronger or one that is humbler on the challenge.

### Personal Interviews of Volunteer Responses

One additional area that could bring a balanced perspective to the tool’s effectiveness is the voice of specific volunteers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to combine the data from the follow-up survey with expanded thoughts on the tool. Seven volunteer youth leaders were selected at random to hold a 15-minute personal interview about the developed tool. Out of direct email communication with the seven people selected, five of these leaders replied with openness to be involved in this additional step. The five volunteer youth leaders were two women and three men. This gender breakdown was reflective of the general population of the initial survey, once accounted for the respondents that were pastors.<sup>26</sup> Among the five volunteer youth leaders, two were volunteers in a congregation with a paid youth director and three served as the main youth leader on a volunteer basis.

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26. Appendix B. The initial survey of 67 people showed demographics of 19.4% women and 80.6% men. Survey line A1 found 34 respondents indicated they serve as lay or ordained pastors. The AFLC has a deeply-held conviction over its entire history that God’s design for the congregational position of pastors is aligned with men. When the pastors are removed from the gender designation, the youth leader gender percentages adjust to 39.4% women and 60.6% men for youth leaders. This 2:3 ratio of women-to-men was randomly represented in the five that agreed to participate in the semi-structured interviews.

The semi-structured interviews incorporated three questions. First, in what way is this tool most helpful for youth leaders? Next, in what way is this tool not addressing the needs of volunteer youth leaders with today's youth culture? Last, a question was personalized based on the individual volunteer youth leader's post-tool survey results. A further question was in some cases generated based on the nature of the respondent's comments. The sequence of these three questions intended to highlight the strengths, the weaknesses, and the personal perspective.

The volunteer youth leaders were offered either the video conferencing tool GoToMeeting or a phone call for the interview. None selected the GoToMeeting option, while four opted for phone calls. The fifth person offered a face-to-face session for the semi-structured interview. Although an extremely small sample size, this consistent apathy toward video conferencing may provide a glimpse into how volunteers think for those seeking to serve volunteer youth leaders. The five that agreed to the interviews were offered a ten-day window between October 9 and October 19, 2019, in which to select a time for the sessions. All five volunteer youth leaders selected days from October 12 through October 18. The summarized transcripts of the personal interviews can be found sequentially in Appendix F.<sup>27</sup>

The semi-structured interviews raised a consistent theme about application. The main strengths included the emphasis on identifying the cultural text and ministering to all of a teenager's world. The third interviewee commented, "It is useful to think through the heart, head, and hands – the whole person." The second volunteer youth leader in the interviews stressed that the visuals involved in the tool were productive for the leaders and teenagers to understand the

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27. Appendix F. The five personal interviews were recorded for the main points of feedback on the three guided questions. Additional commentary was included in the participants' answers, but for review purposes the core content is considered here.

concepts being considered. All five mentioned to some degree the capacity for the tool to be helpful in working with teenagers.

The main weaknesses that came up in the interviews expanded on the follow-up survey's tones. As the follow-up survey allowed for a single reply on the area of improvement, the interviewees had more space to comment on refinements. The repeated theme that arose pointed to the combination of detailed instructions linked with a model of the tool being completed. The first interviewee expressed, "The layout...is not complex, but the thought process on paper is different than my thought process." In this way, a summary guide could be built to address the various sections and the definitions, while a fully completed example would demonstrate how the tool is utilized. The fifth interviewee highlighted that the tool "can only work so far" and that "we cannot break it down and make it scientific" in relationship to ministry with teenagers. For the tool to remain flexible, the instructions and the example will be most beneficial if these materials allow for many streams of thought in evaluation.

The personal perspective questions allowed the volunteer youth leader's voice to reflect on the ministry position's potential. The thoughts expressed consistently echoed that the tool could serve those involved in teaching, both in the congregation and in the home. The fourth interviewee stressed the importance of parents, while the second interviewee affirmed that both "pastors and parents" could benefit from such a tool, since "looking at things from the youths' perspective would be good for them." Since the volunteer youth leader is looking at things from a teenager's viewpoint, this leader can encourage parents and pastors to do the same.

These five volunteer youth leaders understood their influence is not the only direction in teenagers' lives, but they also know it is an important one. The third interviewee pointed to the intentionality needed as caring adults and the guidance leaders can offer, especially as teachers

of God's truth. The first person interviewed indicated that whatever the cultural text that could be covered, it needs to be an area that is "common to the issues for teens." The volunteer youth leader shines when the influence as a Kingdom worker and the attentiveness as a youth observer come together. This ground is the valuable area that this tool for cultural engagement attempts to join and to contribute to the conversation.

### The Surveying and the Interviews

The combination of the follow-up survey results and the personal interviews suggest some important observations. First, the tool triggers personal assessment on engagement with today's youth culture. The overall direction of the surveys and the feedback from the interviews together indicate consideration on how effective the leader and the congregation are in engaging teenagers with cultural conversations. The surveys demonstrate a growing awareness on what is and is not happening in this area. The interviews draw attention to the need for accessible language and established trust between youth leaders and teenagers.

Second, the tool introduces important language for having conversations with teenagers. The contributions of Wolters with creation, fall, redemption, and restoration as well as Staub with alien, ambassador, and artist position the volunteer youth leader for theologically accessible conversations. The interviews suggest that these terms need more definition, but when properly introduced they serve effectively the cultural engagement approach.

Third, the tool is primarily helpful, but it also had specific drawbacks. A majority of post-tool respondents expressed no need for refining the tool, but 20 out of 45 people noted either the instructions were insufficient or the design was not fully intuitive for them. Both hurdles are

manageable to address with a detailed example and increased intentionality in the structure. The goal of keeping the tool flexible to a wide range of cultural texts can remain, while supplemented with a clear description and a populated sample.

Last, the tool places the volunteer youth leader in a position of building bridges. Whether they embraced this role or resisted the thought, the surveys uncover that youth leaders are cultural translators. The tool invites the volunteer youth leader to engage teenagers in areas that are familiar to the youths, even if these cultural texts may not be as familiar to them. The result is caring, believing adults bringing up cultural texts from the world of teens and these leaders walking with them back to God's Word.

## **Conclusion**

The developed tool for cultural engagement addresses the intersection of content and culture. The content of God's Word is unchanging. The culture of today's teenagers is ever-changing. This tool is designed to be flexible to the cultural texts that are currently being raised as well as ones that will be raised in the future. At the same time, the tool is adaptable to many different congregational settings in which the volunteer youth leader will be involved. On top of these two characteristics, the tool must also be accessible to the volunteer youth leaders that are invested in the lives of teenagers.

The surveys and the interviews found that entering into conversations about cultural engagement leads to an increasing clarity on the issues involved, but not always into a precise response on how to address them. The developed tool for cultural engagement offers a flexible way to begin the bridge-building process. The potential larger influence of equipping the

volunteer youth leader for these cultural engagements and reminding the volunteer youth leader to enter conversations with today's teenagers may be the most lasting opportunity of this tool.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

This chapter will examine four sections related to the volunteer youth leader: cultural translation implications, congregational ministry impact, future considerations, and the director's role.

#### **Cultural Translation Implications**

This project postulated that a volunteer youth leader has the existing relationship with the teenagers in the congregational context, or the capacity for this relationship, which can be leveraged for healthy connections leading teenagers to cultural engagement. In this way, the volunteer youth leader is in a prime position both to build bridges with teenagers and to engage in spiritual conversations related to culture.

The surveys and the developed tool pointed to a consistent theme that the volunteer youth leader can be a cultural translator. The movement from the pre-tool survey to the post-tool survey demonstrated a growing confidence among a portion in their ability to engage with teenagers in their context in this way. For others, the results pointed to an awareness of the youth culture's influence. When this recognition set in, it seemed to create a cautious tone about how to address building bridges with them. Overall, the post-tool survey reflected a reduced number of responses in the median of "Neutral," which established the solidifying of respondents' positions toward one opinion or the other.



Does the volunteer youth leader see oneself as a cultural translator? The surveys were mixed on this area. The project assumed that the profile of a volunteer youth leader will be open to a tool for these discussions and that such a tool could be developed to be accessible without respect to age, gender, or experience. With respect to the volunteer youth leader being open, the surveys and the semi-structured interviews that followed indicate in general that these leaders are open to the discussions. When it comes to the tool, the majority (25 of 45 post-tool respondents) found the tool adequate with nothing to adapt, or made no comment when given the opportunity to refine it. Connected to those results, 20 of 45 respondents highlighted the need for the tool to increase its instructions, to improve its design, or to inspect its premise that the leader would be properly positioned to use it. The last objection did not question the role of a volunteer youth leader, but challenged if the typical youth director understood relational ministry to the degree that they could utilize the tool.

Regarding the area of instructions, the language gleaned from various authors showed itself to be helpful. Kenda Creasy Dean's insights on translators was applied, but little was utilized with regards to her comments on imagination.<sup>1</sup> Albert Wolters' guidance provided a way to view the biblical account through the lens of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.<sup>2</sup> Within the training session, volunteer youth leaders indicated the meaning of those terms carried a wide-range of connotations to them. Dick Staub's framework proved useful for cultural

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1. Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling Us about the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 123. Dean addresses translation in Chapter 6.

2. Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2005), 87.

engagement as alien, ambassador, and artist.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the theological tradition of the survey's context gravitates only toward the first two terms. This topic will be examined further in the next section. Each of these contributions impacted the end result for the volunteer youth leader as a cultural translator.

Considering the area of design, certain elements were highlighted within the tool. Color offered segments stronger priority. Blue was a primary color for the front, while orange was featured on the back. Directional arrows provided guidance within the tool, but additional design aid could strengthen the flow for the person working through the tool. This student's limitations on design suggest that outside expertise would enhance the tool's overall appearance and accessibility to the volunteer youth leader. Collaborating with graphic designers or those accomplished with presenting tools for the local congregation may greatly enhance this area.

Although the scope of this project was the volunteer youth leader, the surveys and the semi-structured interviews demonstrated that the respondents were equally concerned about other adults involved in the lives of teenagers. The role of pastor came through the surveys above the volunteer youth leader as a ministry position that could benefit from this tool. Closely related, the respondents pointed in the direction of teenagers' parents and congregational teachers as ones that could benefit from the cultural translation efforts. The focus on the volunteer youth leader has its importance, but a congregation cannot ignore the influence offered by the pastors, teachers, and parents.

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3. Dick Staub, *The Culturally Savvy Christian: A Manifesto for Deepening Faith and Enriching Popular Culture in an Age of Christianity-Lite* (San Francisco: Wiley & Sons Press, 2007), 134. After first introducing this shorthand, Staub develops the three terms in the following three chapters.

Overall, the project affirmed that there is a reasonable and important space for the volunteer youth leader as a cultural translator.

### **Congregational Ministry Impact**

This project was applied in the context of the Association of Free Lutheran Congregations (AFLC). Among its member local churches, the respondents to the surveys pointed to the highest value within the developed tool of how cultural texts lead teenagers to think, to feel, to act, and to believe. The leaders that interacted with the tool also saw the strength of providing scriptural guidance on how the biblical text addresses these cultural texts. Almost two-thirds of respondents to the post-tool survey (29 out of 45) envisioned using this tool for cultural engagement on a quarterly basis or more frequently in their youth ministry setting. In this way, one would anticipate conversations on cultural engagement to grow out of the tool's utilization.

The developed tool was focused on the volunteer youth leader, but the semi-structured interviews pointed to the variance in the experience of this title. Of the randomly selected leaders for the follow-up participation, two were active in a congregation alongside of a paid youth director and three were the primary youth leader as a volunteer. Each one saw the benefit of the developed tool, but the individual expression of cultural engagement in their congregational context will bring a broad spectrum of applications.

The AFLC stresses the work of God's Word and God's Spirit in the local congregation. The developed tool for cultural engagement could be applied in a formal youth ministry environment such as youth group or Sunday School, but the freedom of application could apply

to other environments. Formal settings such as men's and women's ministry as well as informal settings in congregational life could use this tool. Any space where adults and teenagers interact about faith and the world is a place where this tool could be beneficial.

Congregations that are led by a vocational youth leader may find value in adapting the developed tool for their context. Those settings in which the paid leader recruits many volunteers as small group leaders with teenagers may see the strength in training these adults to hold cultural conversations with the cues provided in this tool. This project was motivated by the profile of a volunteer youth leader that is the primary point person for a median-sized congregation of 76 in the United States, but congregations both larger and smaller may identify applications from this project in their context.<sup>4</sup>

The dynamic of theological perspective was seen throughout the project's activity. The AFLC heritage of Lutheran pietism links primarily with Niebuhr's types of "Christ against Culture" (Type I) and "Christ and Culture in Paradox" (Type IV).<sup>5</sup> Staub's terms of alien and ambassador align with these two types, but the third application of artist would in most cases be less familiar for an AFLC youth leader. Within Niebuhr's discussion of the full spectrum of types, he acknowledges that conversations about cultural engagement involve a "double movement from world to God and from God to world."<sup>6</sup> The AFLC's emphasis underscores the portion of "from God to world" and the developed tool seeks to explore "from world to God."

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4. National Congregations Study (NCS), [http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/Docs/NCSIII\\_report\\_final.pdf](http://www.soc.duke.edu/natcong/Docs/NCSIII_report_final.pdf), title page summary and acknowledgements, accessed November 30, 2018.

5. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1952), Introduction xliii-lv.

6. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 29.

As a result, the instructions may need to be sensitive to the context that volunteer youth leaders in the AFLC hold as a theological perspective.

As a national youth director, the parallels to other church bodies could have benefits. Other denominations may find fruitful results from introducing a tool for cultural engagement to the volunteer youth leaders in their fellowship. This project found that beginning with the work of Niebuhr enlightens a denominational perspective on the work of cultural engagement. From there, the contributions of Dean, Wolters, and Staub appear to be transcendent for many Christian denominations. Although that may be the case, it would seem strongest for key leaders in each fellowship to develop the framework for a tool that is intrinsic to their denominational distinctives and perspective.

### **Future Considerations**

Three ministry roles suggest further examination as a result of this project: the volunteer youth leader, the pastor, and the parent of a teenager.

The volunteer youth leader is an effective bridge-builder. This premise has been explored within this project and it is clear that the caring, believing adult in the local congregation has the ability to communicate the content of scripture and to connect with the culture of an American adolescent. The process of the surveys and the semi-structured interviews suggested that more could be accomplished to provide both accessibility and “space” for them. One way to increase accessibility would be to provide further definitions of terms and examples of the categories involved. After the post-surveys and the semi-structured interviews, an introduction page was

developed with definitions and examples while the second page retained the “space” for the volunteer youth leader to explore.<sup>7</sup>

When looking at accessibility, it is noteworthy that out of the 414 MailChimp emails sent on the initial survey, 67 were completed. Only 61 were done via the email correspondence and the other six were finished in person with an identical paper layout of the survey. This project presumed that email communication was a preferred method for the volunteer youth leader. With the semi-structured interviews, none of the randomly selected volunteer youth leaders chose a free video conferencing option. Four selected a phone interview and a fifth an in-person connection. The best methods for communicating with the volunteer youth leader may not yet be employed. If email and video conferencing are not preferred while phone and in-person are prioritized, then the delivery approach for the denominational leaders and congregational leaders working with volunteer youth leaders may need to be refined. Further exploration on best methods to engage the volunteer youth leader could be very productive.

The second related area is the concept of “space” for the volunteer youth leader. In their joint article “The Rabbinic Leader and the Volunteer Leader,” Rabbi Stuart Kelman and Alison Jordan describe how they have found the needed space and ownership within their synagogue.<sup>8</sup> The picture is of the established spiritual leader, in this instance the rabbi, not serving in such a way that brings “filling of all space.”<sup>9</sup> When every question is covered and every gap is filled by

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7. Appendix G. “Tool with Additional Instructions” reflects the refinement guidance received through the post-surveys and semi-structured interviews. Visiting with more volunteer youth leaders about the developed tool could further strengthen it.

8. Rabbi Stuart Kelman and Alison Jordan, “The Rabbinic Leader and the Volunteer Leader,” *Religious Education* 97, no. 4 (2002): 322. Portions of the article were penned by the rabbi and a portion was written by the volunteer.

9. Kelman and Jordan, “The Rabbinic Leader,” 325.

the vocational leader, then the room for the contribution of the volunteer is reduced or eliminated. In contrast, when a spiritual leader invites “space” for the congregational members, then the volunteers contribute. Our vocational leaders will benefit from being “ready to work, guide, and assist people in their chosen roles, but not to do the work for them.”<sup>10</sup> The volunteer youth leader’s capacity to build bridges will be influenced by the “space” provided by the congregational leadership.

The pastor is also positioned to be an effective bridge-builder. By the nature of their role, pastors seek to shepherd the entire local church. The results of the survey placed the pastor as the highest potential benefactor from the developed tool (37 of 45 respondents). The perspective of those surveyed, which included a segment of pastors, stressed the clergy slightly over the volunteer youth leader (35 of 45 respondents). Voices from church history within this project such as Justin Martyr, Augustine, Luther, and Bonhoeffer may stir the established clergy to rethink their positions and their practice on the proper place of the laity. It is abundantly clear that the authority of God’s Word and the participation of the priesthood of all believers are essential elements for healthy youth ministry. In addition, those that influence the pastorate could strongly encourage the clergy to give priority to equipping volunteer youth leaders and to building bridges with the teenagers in their congregational context. More study could be done on working with pastors to equip the saints, namely the ones serving teenagers, for the work of service.

A parent of a teenager may not realize his position to be an effective bridge-builder. The third role identified for future consideration is not universally thought of as a ministry role. A

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10. Kelman and Jordan, “The Rabbinic Leader,” 326.

parent of a teenager has a significant sway over the nature of family priorities and household conversations. Since 34 of the 45 respondents to the post-tool survey noted that a parent of a teenager would benefit from the developed tool, parents are worth a leader's time and attention. When cultural texts are identified by a parent, this tool would equip him to build a bridge to a spiritual conversation.

Two opportunities present themselves with respect to this last observation. First, the volunteer youth leader has a voice to encourage parents toward spiritual conversations in the home. Utilizing tools that the youth leader finds effective in the specific congregational context, this volunteer director can assist parents of adolescents. With trust established between a volunteer youth leader and a teenager's parent, conversations about faith and life could occur within the walls of the church and the home. Second, this student as a national youth leader has a voice to engage parents for their role as a spiritual caregiver. A future consideration could be the adaption of the developed tool with a view to the context of a parent, instead of a volunteer youth leader. An initial assessment would need to identify the language that links best to the parent of a teenager. It is very possible that what this project gleaned from Dean, Wolters, and Staub would still be preferred, but it cannot be initially concluded without further examination.

### **The Director's Role**

From the early church fathers to modern theologians, the priesthood of all believers has been affirmed. This reality extends to the volunteer youth leader. As a voice that has been overlooked, it is a needed voice to be heard again in passing on the faith to the next generation. The larger influence of equipping the volunteer youth leader for cultural engagement has only



begun to be explored. The volunteer youth leader is to be prioritized and supported for Christ and Christ's Kingdom.

Middle school music concerts can be challenging. Young people learning to control the instrument of the voice, while in the midst of the major physical changes that accompany puberty, creates quite the combination. On top of this dynamic, the creature known in American culture as a middle school student can be more than a bit unpredictable. Who would be bold enough to volunteer to direct such a crew?

Another middle school student.

The Saint Michael-Albertville School District in Minnesota is known in the area for its excellence in the arts. This pursuit of performance is not limited to the high school, but extends to the two middle schools. One previous choral director known for her work with middle school students commanded four different 70-member choirs, each grade making up one class. In addition to the sharpening of their choral skills, this director demonstrated a concern for them as people. This approach of skill development and relational connection included an invitation each year for an eighth grade student to direct her peers in a song at the spring concert. In front of hundreds of family members and community friends, a fourteen year-old conducts the choir. For those minutes, this teenager receives a taste of leading and a glimpse toward maturity.

If a middle school student can be prioritized and supported to conduct her peers, what is keeping the church in America from doing a parallel effort with caring, believing volunteer adults? The same kind of leadership that the choir director demonstrates is qualitatively identical to youth ministry. The volunteer youth leader calls teenagers to know Jesus and guides these adolescents in God's truth and in their interaction with the world. The crossroad of the content of

music and the culture of adolescents is where the middle school choir director lives, and in a parallel way, the crossroad of the content of God's Word and the culture of teenagers is where the volunteer youth leader thrives.

In addition to the student director, Saint Michael-Albertville Middle School concerts are known for one other calling card: the holiday concert. Filled with a variety of pieces from regional to international tunes, this joint concert of the middle schools regularly utilizes the 1450-seat Performing Arts Center at the high school.<sup>11</sup> Yes, at the high school! The tradition instituted by the former choir director for the closing song is a rendition of "Peace, Peace" with words from Rick and Sylvia Powell, arranged by Fred Bock.<sup>12</sup> The leader that trained and released a middle school student to direct 70 of her peers now steps forward and explains to the crowd what will unfold. The director pivots to hold the gaze of the adolescent choir in conducting posture. The teenagers begin the text of "Peace, Peace" and complete the first two stanzas of the song.

The director then turns to the assembly.

As the teenagers on stage continue with their parts, the piece is written to allow the director to guide the audience through a perfectly meshed "Silent Night" into the choir's "Peace on Earth." A formal class together with an informal crowd. Two unexpected groups become one choir. Two songs become one refrain. The director engages the whole auditorium.

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11. St. Michael-Albertville High School (Minnesota), <https://www.stma.k12.mn.us/domain/63>, accessed November 1, 2019.

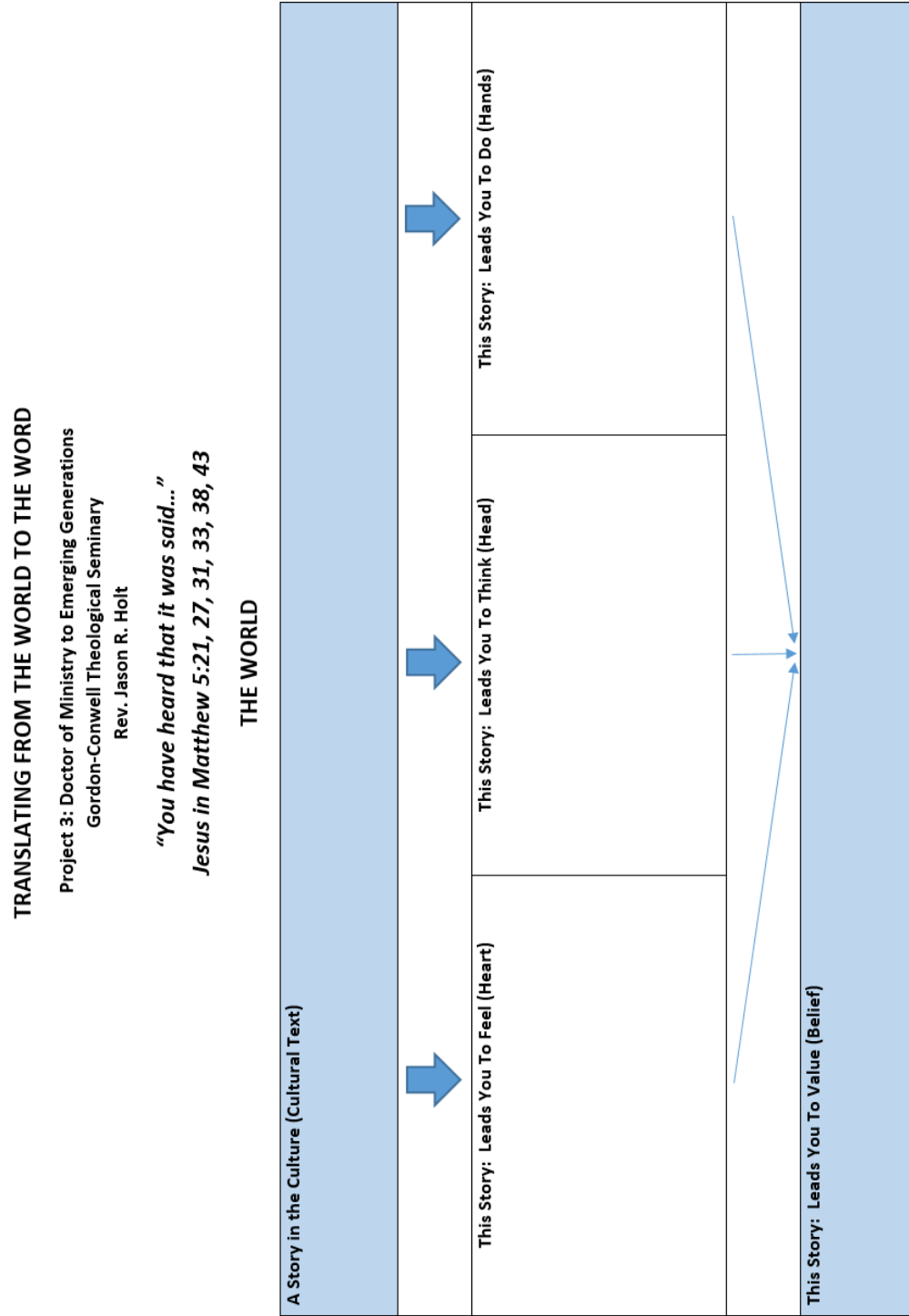
12. Rick Powell and Sylvia Powell, arranged by Fred Bock, "Peace, Peace," <https://www.halleonard.com/product/viewproduct.action?itemid=8738350>, accessed November 1, 2019.

The volunteer youth leader stands where the choir director stood at that concert. This caring, believing adult knows the influences of the world and she celebrates the power of the Word. With a keen awareness of the teenagers' parents and the community's adults as well as a growing connection with teens in the congregation, the volunteer youth leader's call is to direct. The volunteer youth leader invests in the lives of the teens. She engages their parents and the community in which she is involved. This spiritual director stands at the intersection of cultural texts and biblical truths, while she waves to teens to walk with her pursuing Jesus together.

The volunteer youth leader has a significant position. She has a voice that the local congregation needs to hear. She has the ability to connect with teenagers. She can communicate the content of the Scriptures. She serves at the crossroads of content from the Bible and culture from today's youth. Will we in our congregations support her picking up the baton as a cultural translator?

APPENDIX A

ONE TOOL FOR CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT



*"But I say to you..."*  
*Jesus in Matthew 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44*

### THE WORD

God's Story for This Culture: Creation – Genesis 1	God's Story for This Culture: Fall – Genesis 3	God's Story for This Culture: Redemption – Luke 24	God's Story for This Culture: Restoration – Revelation 21
God – Character & Activity Man – Image of God World – Made by the Lord	Original Sin Actual Sin Sin's Consequences	Christ as the Center of Scripture Christ Suffered, Died, and Risen Christ's Forgiveness and Hope	New Heaven & New Earth Dwelling Place of God with Men The Lord Makes All Things New
<div>God's Story for This Culture (A Response to the Cultural Text)</div>			
Believer as an Alien (I Peter 2:4-9) -- How does this cultural story intersect with Christ's lordship for a believer?	Believer as an Ambassador (II Cor. 5:16-21) -- How does this cultural story intersect with a believer's citizenship (Phil 3:20-21)?	Believer as an Artist (Ephesians 2:8-10) -- How does this cultural story intersect with a believer's workmanship?	
<div>God's Story: A Believer's Calling (Applied to My Context)</div>			

APPENDIX B  
PRE-TOOL SURVEY INSTRUMENT

## SURVEY FOR AFLC YOUTH LEADERS

Thank you for participating in the following survey! This survey instrument is gathering data for the development of a thesis in partial fulfillment of a Doctorate of Ministry degree through Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. The study is examining the relationship between the content of God's Word and the connections with today's youth culture.

Your answers will remain confidential, but they will be identified by the researcher (Rev. Jason Holt) for comparable outcomes in research methodology. This initial survey will be followed up by a post-tool survey in September 2019. The one page tool will be offered at FLY and after FLY. Your participation in both surveys will generate the most accurate data for the project. Please complete this survey by Sunday, June 30.

The following survey has 35 questions. Please answer all the questions. It will take 15 minutes of your time. Please complete it on a laptop, desktop, or tablet for the best user experience. A Visa gift card for \$10 will be available to the first 50 youth leader participants that completely fill out this survey AND the following one in September that will be of a similar length. Thank you again for your participation!

### YOUR CONTEXT

These first few questions are about you and your congregational context.

A1 - Which of the following best describes your situation? \*

- ☐ Volunteer Youth Leader
- ☐ Part-Time Paid Youth Leader
- ☐ Full-Time Paid Youth Leader
- ☐ Pastor - Lay or Ordained

A2 - If volunteer youth leader, how many hours do your responsibilities involve in a typical week?

- ☐ 1 to 5 hours
- ☐ 6 to 10 hours
- ☐ 11 to 15 hours
- ☐ 16 to 20 hours
- ☐ More than 21 hours
- ☐ Not Applicable - paid ministry leader

A3 - If paid youth leader, how many hours do your responsibilities involve in a typical week?

- ☐ 1 to 10 hours
- ☐ 11 to 20 hours
- ☐ 21 to 30 hours
- ☐ 31 to 40 hours
- ☐ More than 41 hours
- ☐ Not Applicable - volunteer youth leader

A4 - Which of the following best describes the emphasis of the congregation(s) that you are involved in?

- ☐ Our confessional Lutheran emphasis shines strongest, while our evangelical pietistic heritage understanding remains
- ☐ Our evangelical pietistic heritage shines strongest, while our confessional Lutheran heritage understanding remains
- ☐ Our confessional Lutheran and evangelical pietistic heritage emphases are both equally strong

## YOUTH CULTURE

These questions are about today's American youth culture. Please use the following scale of 1 to 5. 1 is for "Strongly Agree", 2 is for "Agree", 3 is for "Neutral", 4 is for "Disagree", and 5 is for "Strongly Disagree."

**B1 - God's Word is instructive to speak truth to today's youth culture.**

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**B2 - God's Word is corrective to address errors in today's youth culture.**

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**B3 - God's Word is directive to Christ's mission engaging within today's youth culture.**

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**B4 - I can see the influence of today's youth culture on the lives of the teenagers that we seek to minister to and with as a congregation**

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



B5 - I understand that specific beliefs witnessed among teenagers in my setting are a result of today's youth culture.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

B6 - I understand that specific behaviors observed among teenagers in my setting are a result of today's youth culture.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

B7 - I would expect that attitudes of the teenagers that I work with would improve if they were removed from today's youth culture.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

B8 - I would expect that actions of the teenagers that I work with would improve if they better understood the need to see their identity in Christ in the midst of today's youth culture.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

B9 - I would expect that aspirations of the teenagers that I work with would improve if they engaged to contribute in a Christian way within today's youth culture.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

B10 - I would expect that if a teenager brought an aspect of today's youth culture to me that I would be equipped to build a bridge to God's Word from the cultural question.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## YOUTH MINISTRY

The following questions examine your views on youth ministry. Please use the following scale of 1 to 5. 1 is for "Strongly Agree", 2 is for "Agree", 3 is for "Neutral", 4 is for "Disagree", and 5 is for "Strongly Disagree."

C1 - For effective youth ministry in our congregation, the communication of God's Word with teenagers is a high priority.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C2 - For effective youth ministry in our congregation, awareness of today's youth culture from the local level is a high priority.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C3 - For effective youth ministry in our congregation, awareness of today's youth culture from the national level is a high priority.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C4 - For effective youth ministry in our congregation, connecting with today's youth culture and leading teenagers to view these through a biblical lens is a high priority.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C5 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity understand themselves in relationship to the lordship of Christ.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C6 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity live in relationship to the lordship of Christ.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C7 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity understand themselves as citizens of Christ's Kingdom.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C8 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity live as citizens of Christ's Kingdom.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C9 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity understand themselves as God's workmanship in this world.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

...

C10 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity live as God's workmanship in this world.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C11 - My approach to youth ministry includes communicating God's Word with teenagers in my setting.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C12 - My approach to youth ministry includes connecting with teenagers in a relational way within my setting.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C13 - My approach to youth ministry includes engaging with today's youth culture for the sake of teenagers in my setting.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C14 - Cultural engagement of today's youth culture from a biblical perspective is an important factor in effective youth ministry.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C15 - Cultural engagement of today's youth culture from a biblical perspective is a high priority in our congregational setting.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## YOUR DEMOGRAPHICS

Description (optional)

What is your age range? \*

- ☐ 18-25
- ☐ 26-35
- ☐ 36-45
- ☐ 46-55
- ☐ 56-65
- ☐ Over 65

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

What is your length of time in your current congregation? (In Years)

- ☐ 0 to 5
- ☐ 6 to 10
- ☐ 11 to 15
- ☐ 16 to 20
- ☐ More than 20

What is your total length of time in all settings for youth ministry involvement? (In Years)

- ☐ 0 to 5
- ☐ 6 to 10
- ☐ 11 to 15
- ☐ 16 to 20
- ☐ More than 20

Preferred Email <sup>\*</sup>

Short answer text

---

Name for Gift Card Eligibility at the End of the Project & for the Survey Integrity

Short answer text

---

Thank you so much for your time! If you are interested in the final results of this project, which will be available in early 2020, please contact Jason Holt at [jasonholt@afic.org](mailto:jasonholt@afic.org).

Description (optional)



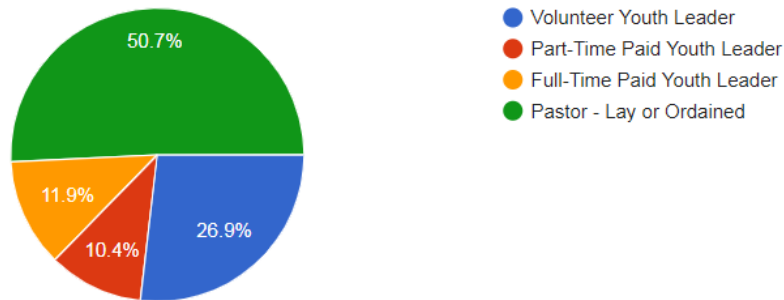
## APPENDIX C

### PRE-TOOL SURVEY RESULTS

#### YOUR CONTEXT

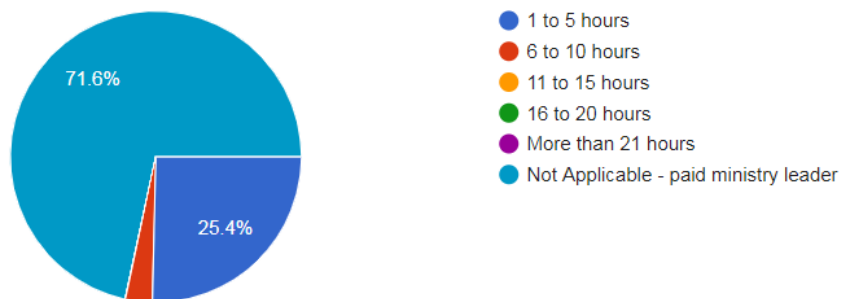
#### A1 - Which of the following best describes your situation?

67 responses



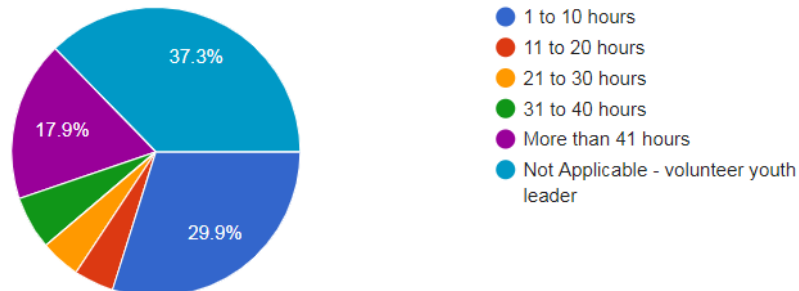
#### A2 - If volunteer youth leader, how many hours do your responsibilities involve in a typical week?

67 responses



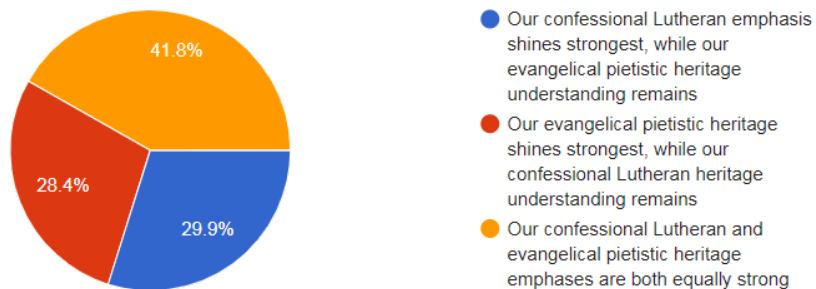
### A3 - If paid youth leader, how many hours do your responsibilities involve in a typical week?

67 responses



### A4 - Which of the following best describes the emphasis of the congregation(s) that you are involved in?

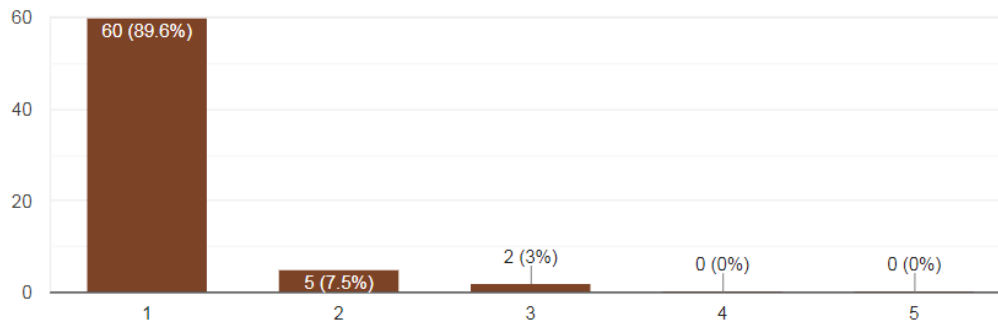
67 responses



## YOUTH CULTURE

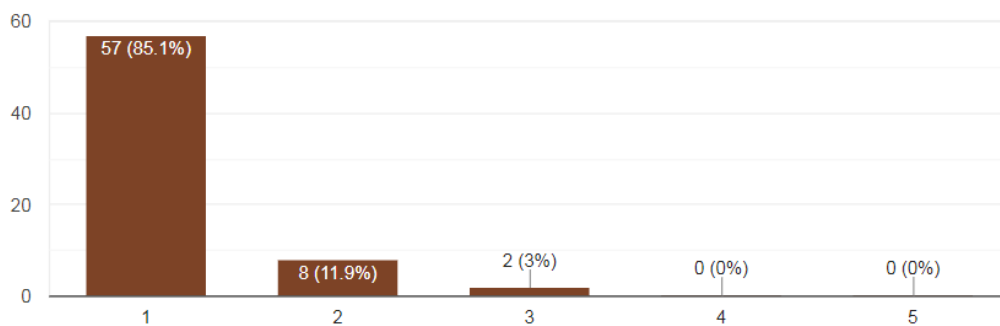
**B1 - God's Word is instructive to speak truth to today's youth culture.**

67 responses



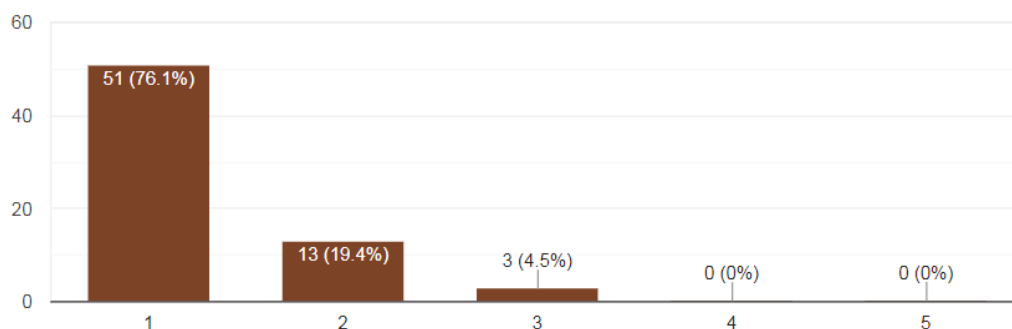
**B2 - God's Word is corrective to address errors in today's youth culture.**

67 responses



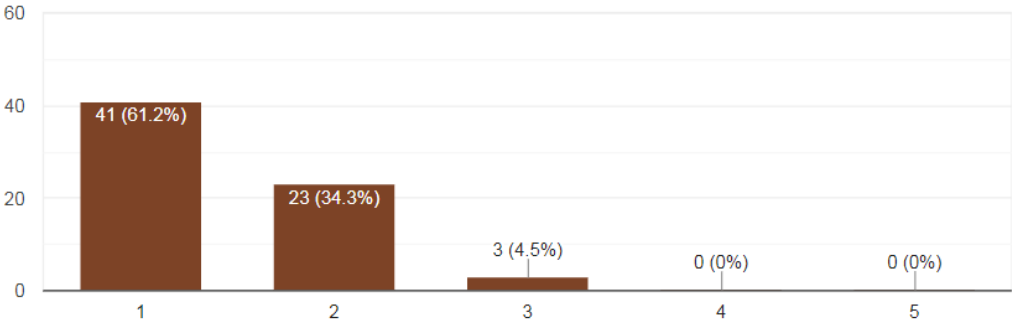
**B3 - God's Word is directive to Christ's mission engaging within today's youth culture.**

67 responses



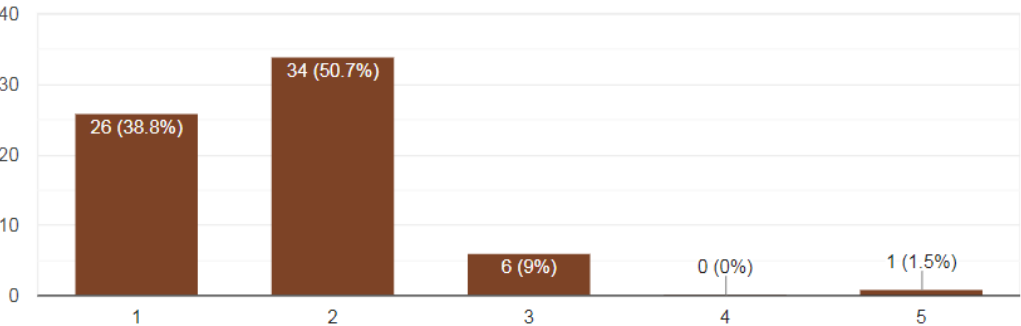
**B4 - I can see the influence of today's youth culture on the lives of the teenagers that we seek to minister to and with as a congregation**

67 responses



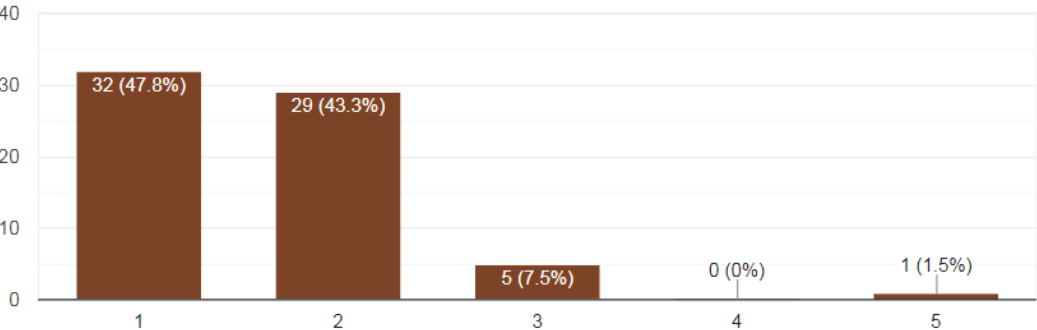
**B5 - I understand that specific beliefs witnessed among teenagers in my setting are a result of today's youth culture.**

67 responses



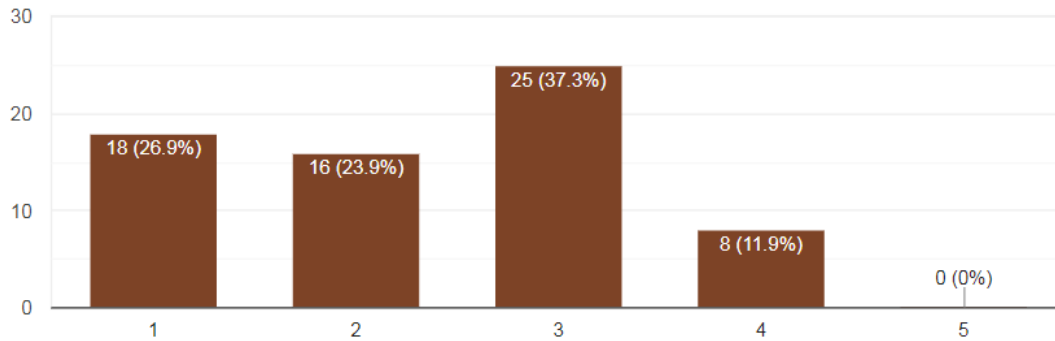
**B6 - I understand that specific behaviors observed among teenagers in my setting are a result of today's youth culture.**

67 responses



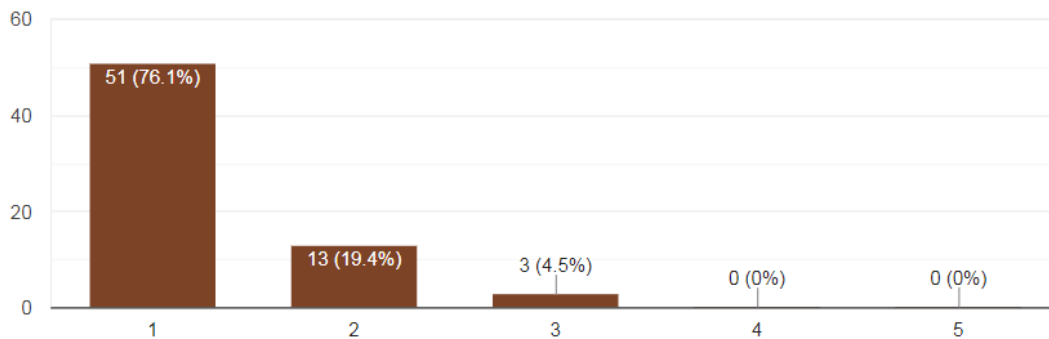
**B7 - I would expect that attitudes of the teenagers that I work with would improve if they were removed from today's youth culture.**

67 responses



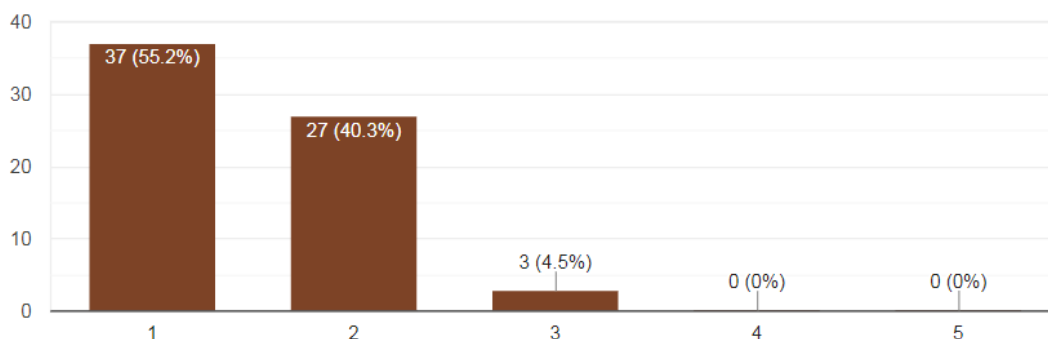
**B8 - I would expect that actions of the teenagers that I work with would improve if they better understood the need to see their identity in Christ in the midst of today's youth culture.**

67 responses



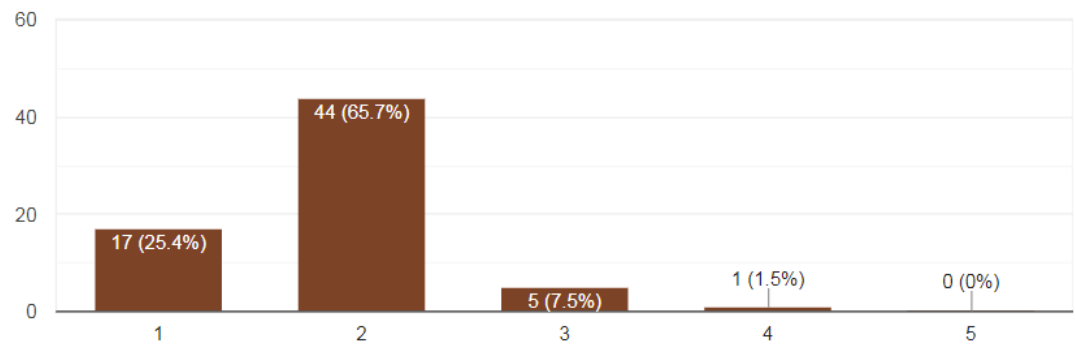
**B9 - I would expect that aspirations of the teenagers that I work with would improve if they engaged to contribute in a Christian way within today's youth culture.**

67 responses



B10 - I would expect that if a teenager brought an aspect of today's youth culture to me that I would be equipped to build a bridge to God's Word from the cultural question.

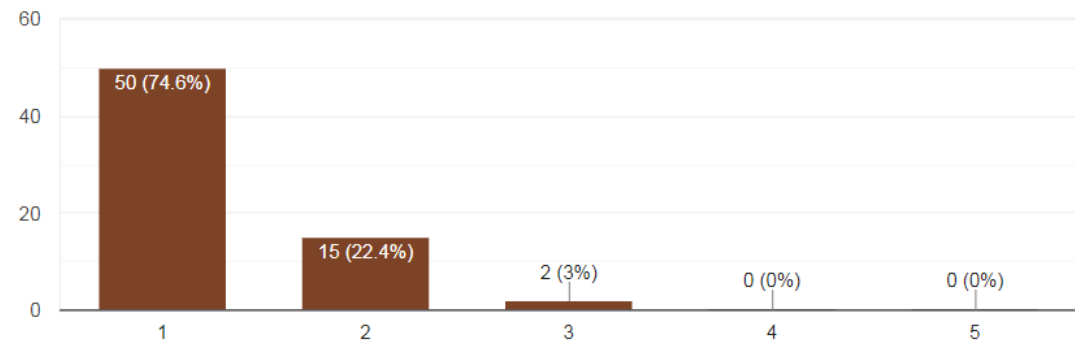
67 responses



YOUTH MINISTRY

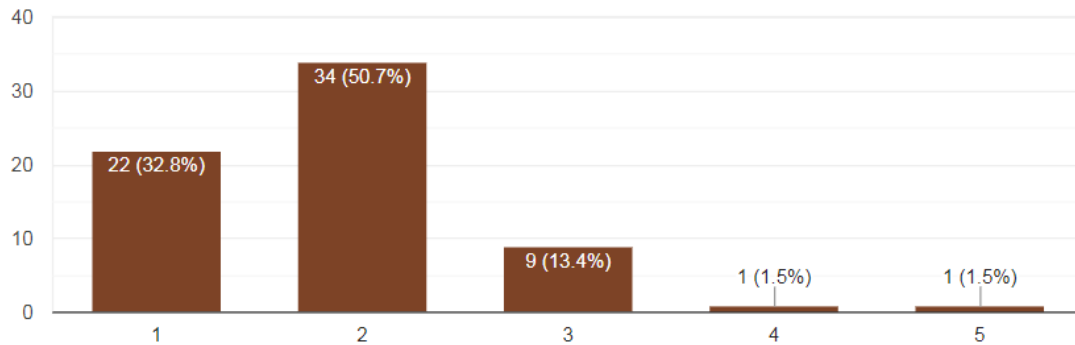
C1 - For effective youth ministry in our congregation, the communication of God's Word with teenagers is a high priority.

67 responses



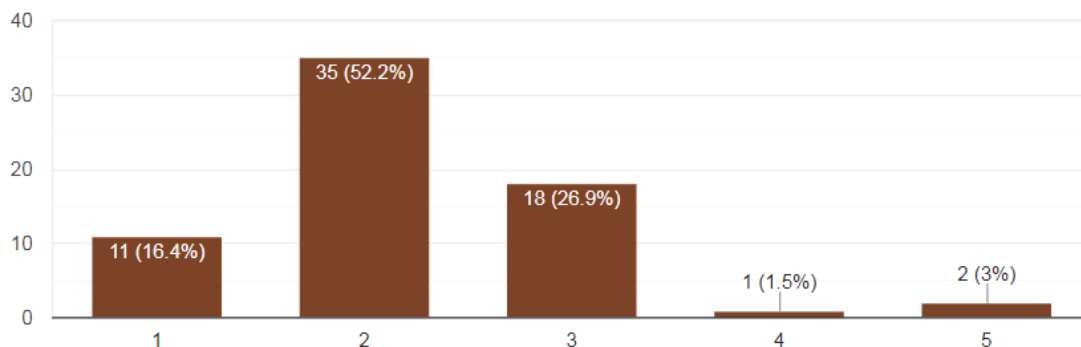
C2 - For effective youth ministry in our congregation, awareness of today's youth culture from the local level is a high priority.

67 responses



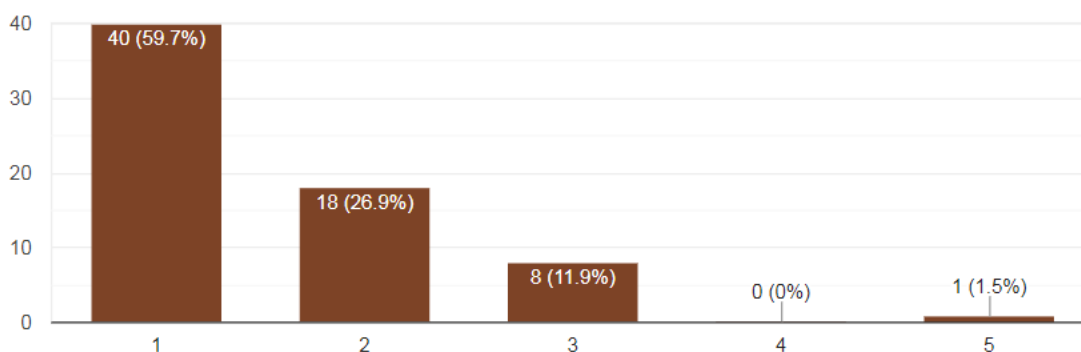
C3 - For effective youth ministry in our congregation, awareness of today's youth culture from the national level is a high priority.

67 responses



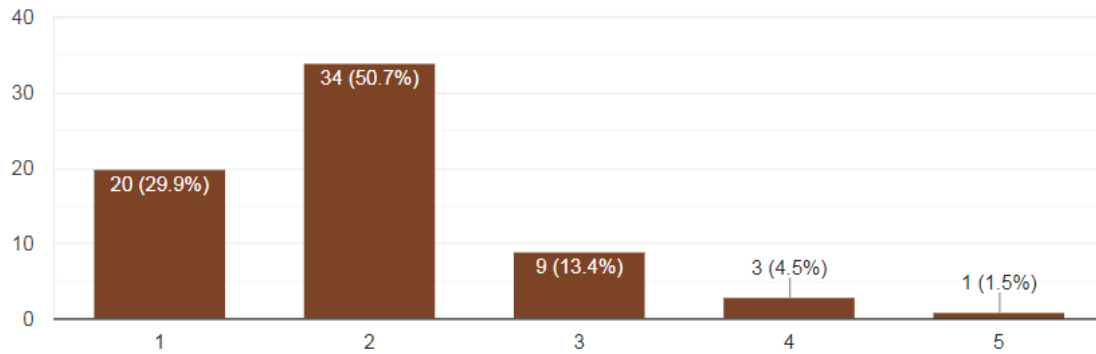
C4 - For effective youth ministry in our congregation, connecting with today's youth culture and leading teenagers to view these through a biblical lens is a high priority.

67 responses



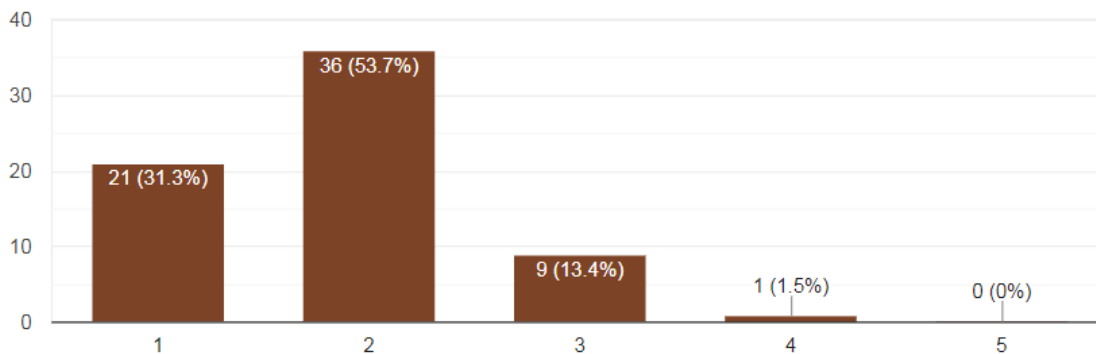
**C5 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity understand themselves in relationship to the lordship of Christ.**

67 responses



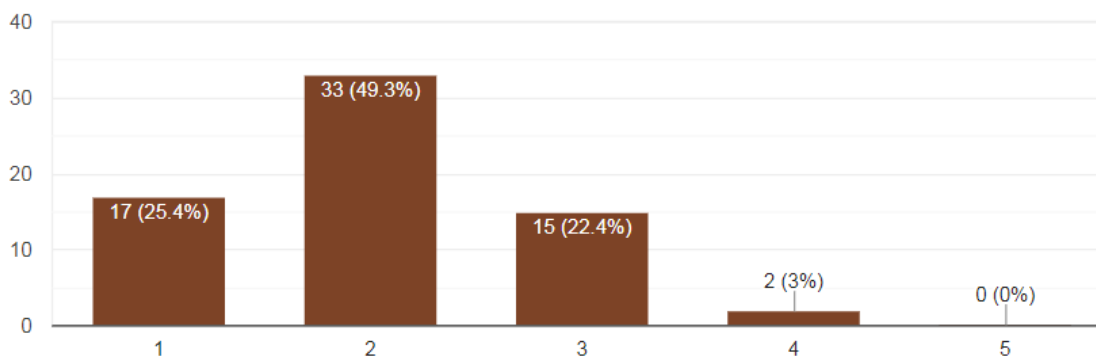
**C6 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity live in relationship to the lordship of Christ.**

67 responses



**C7 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity understand themselves as citizens of Christ's Kingdom.**

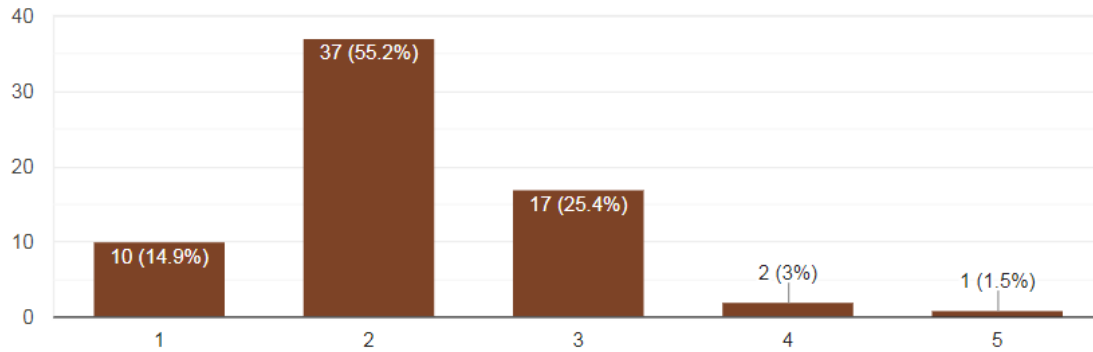
67 responses





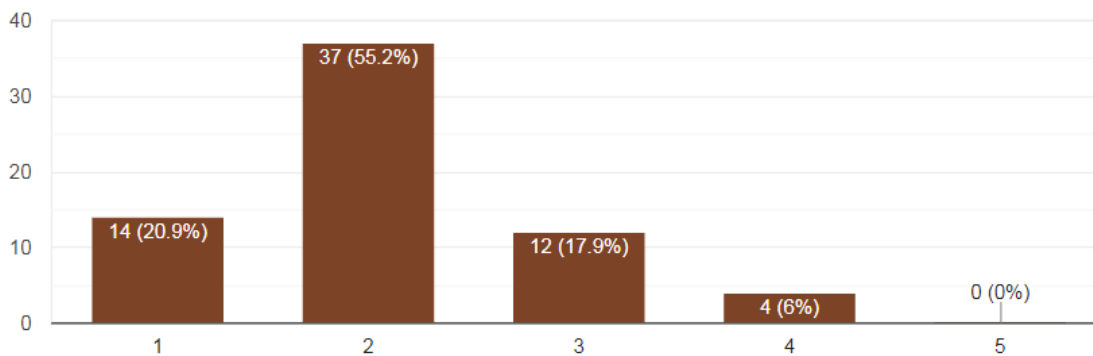
C8 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity live as citizens of Christ's Kingdom.

67 responses



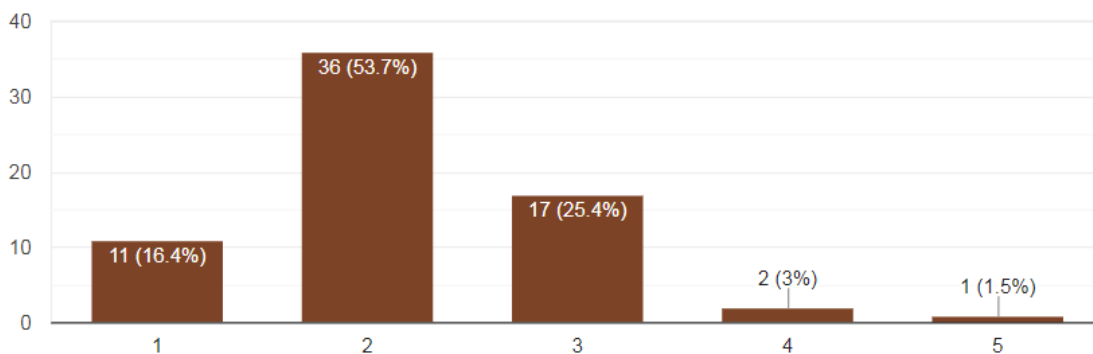
C9 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity understand themselves as God's workmanship in this world.

67 responses



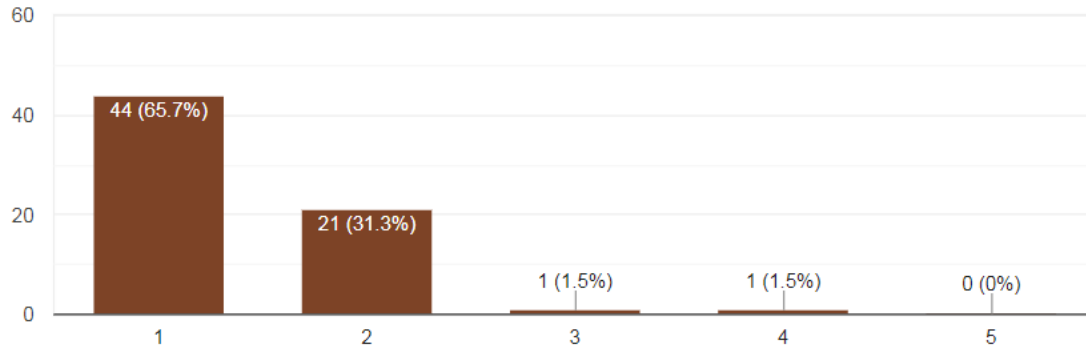
C10 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity live as God's workmanship in this world.

67 responses



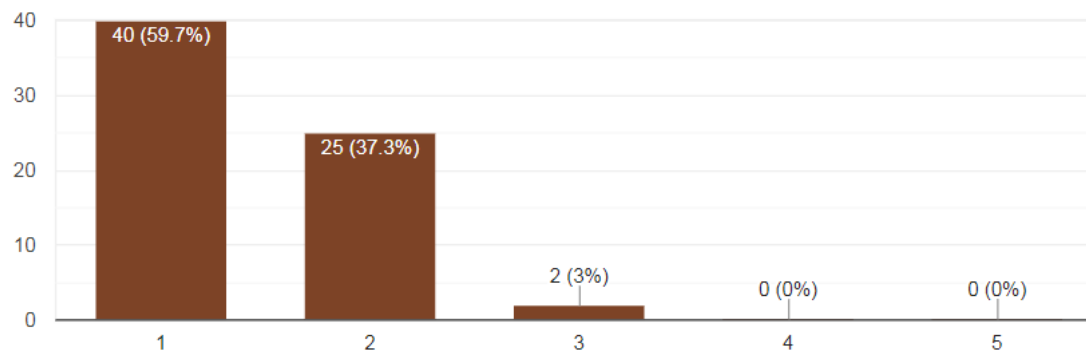
C11 - My approach to youth ministry includes communicating God's Word with teenagers in my setting.

67 responses



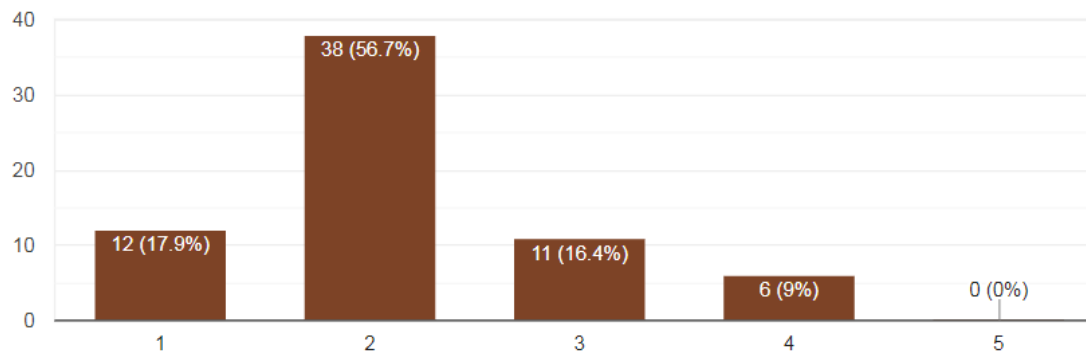
C12 - My approach to youth ministry includes connecting with teenagers in a relational way within my setting.

67 responses



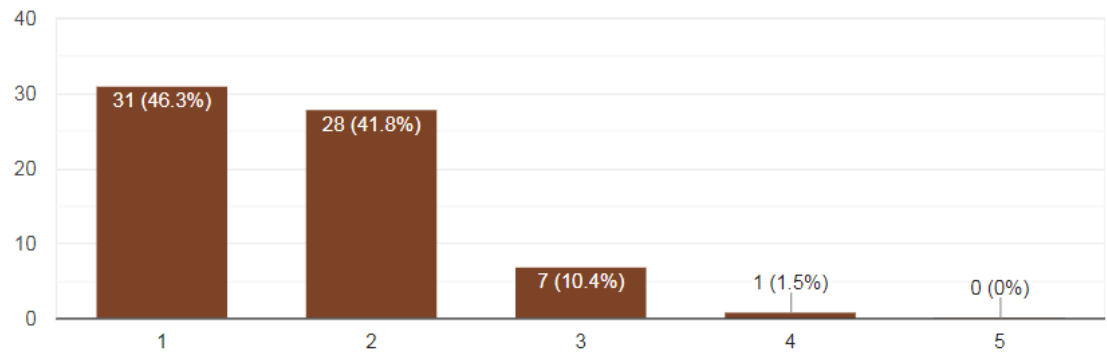
C13 - My approach to youth ministry includes engaging with today's youth culture for the sake of teenagers in my setting.

67 responses



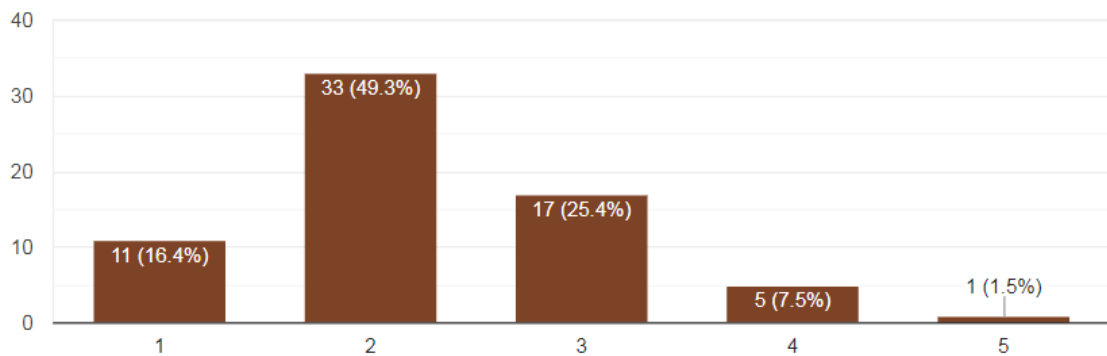
C14 - Cultural engagement of today's youth culture from a biblical perspective is an important factor in effective youth ministry.

67 responses



C15 - Cultural engagement of today's youth culture from a biblical perspective is a high priority in our congregational setting.

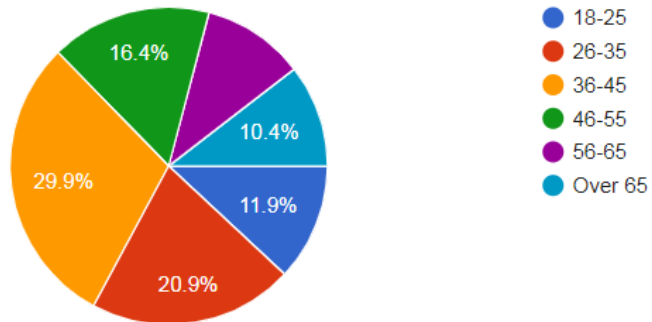
67 responses



## YOUR DEMOGRAPHICS

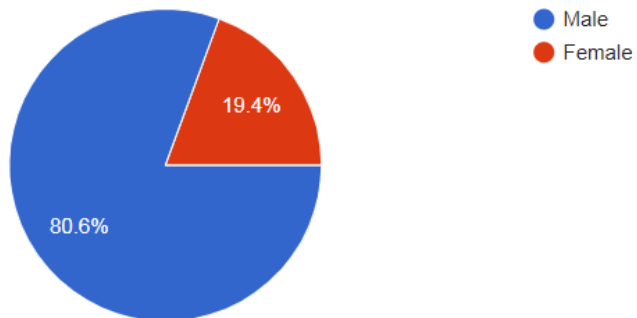
### What is your age range?

67 responses



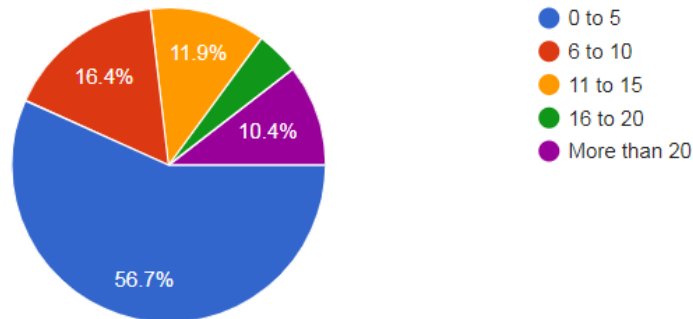
### What is your gender?

67 responses



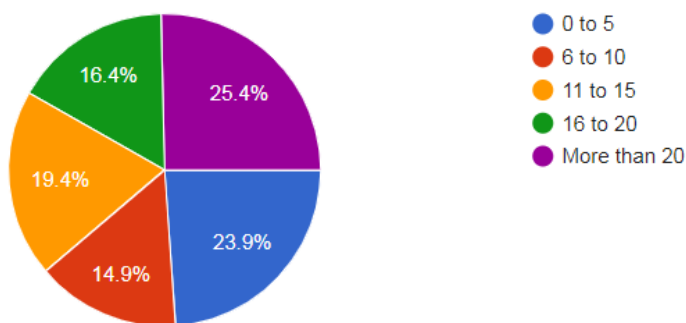
## What is your length of time in your current congregation? (In Years)

67 responses



## What is your total length of time in all settings for youth ministry involvement? (In Years)

67 responses



## Preferred Email

67 responses

## Name for Gift Card Eligibility at the End of the Project & for the Survey Integrity

67 responses

Thank you so much for your time! If you are interested in the final results of this project, which will be available in early 2020, please contact Jason Holt at [jasonholt@afic.org](mailto:jasonholt@afic.org).

APPENDIX D  
POST-TOOL SURVEY INSTRUMENT

## Post-Survey AFLC Youth Leaders - Sept 2019

Thank you for participating in the following Post-Survey! This instrument is a SECOND survey gathering data for the development of a thesis in partial fulfillment of a Doctorate of Ministry degree through Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. The study is examining the relationship between the content of God's Word and the connections with today's youth culture.

Your answers will remain confidential, but they will be identified by the researcher (Rev. Jason Holt) for comparable outcomes in research methodology. The initial survey was issued in June. This post-survey will be utilized during September 2019. The one page tool referenced was offered at the FLY elective "One Tool for Cultural Engagement" and as an email PDF to you after FLY as one that completed the initial survey. Your participation in both surveys will generate the most accurate data for the project. Please complete this survey by Monday, September 23.

The following survey has 35 questions. Please answer all the questions. It will take approximately 15 minutes of your time. Please complete it on a laptop, desktop, or tablet for the best user experience. A Visa gift card for \$10 will be available to the first 50 youth leader participants that completely fill out this survey, since you already completed the earlier one in June. Thank you again for your participation!

### YOUR CONTEXT

These first questions are about you and your setting.

**A1 - Which of the following best describes your situation in relationship to the translation tool? \***

- ☐ Only attended FLY session entitled "One Tool for Cultural Translation"
- ☐ Only received tool via AFLC Youth Ministries' email
- ☐ Both attended FLY session and received email

A2 - In how many instances since July did this tool influence your conversations with teenagers? \*

- ☐ 0
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2 to 4
- ☐ 5 or more

A3 - Did you elect to specifically utilize this tool in a teaching setting with teenagers? \*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

A4 - Did you elect to specifically utilize this tool with parents of teenagers in teaching or conversations with them? \*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

A5 - How frequently could you see yourself utilizing this tool for youth ministry efforts in the future? \*

- ☐ Once per year or less
- ☐ Once per quarter of the year
- ☐ Once per month
- ☐ More frequently than monthly

## YOUTH CULTURE

These questions are about today's American youth culture. Please use the following scale of 1 to 5. 1 is for "Strongly Agree", 2 is for "Agree", 3 is for "Neutral", 4 is for "Disagree", and 5 is for "Strongly Disagree."

**B1 - God's Word is instructive to speak truth to today's youth culture.**

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**B2 - God's Word is corrective to address errors in today's youth culture.**

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**B3 - God's Word is directive to Christ's mission engaging within today's youth culture.**

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**B4 - I can see the influence of today's youth culture on the lives of the teenagers that we seek to minister to and with as a congregation**

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



B5 - I understand that specific beliefs witnessed among teenagers in my setting are a result of today's youth culture.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

B6 - I understand that specific behaviors observed among teenagers in my setting are a result of today's youth culture.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

B7 - I would expect that attitudes of the teenagers that I work with would improve if they were removed from today's youth culture.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

B8 - I would expect that actions of the teenagers that I work with would improve if they better understood the need to see their identity in Christ in the midst of today's youth culture.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

B9 - I would expect that aspirations of the teenagers that I work with would improve if they engaged to contribute in a Christian way within today's youth culture.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

B10 - I would expect that if a teenager brought an aspect of today's youth culture to me that I would be equipped to build a bridge to God's Word from the cultural question.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## YOUTH MINISTRY

The following questions examine your views on youth ministry. Please use the following scale of 1 to 5. 1 is for "Strongly Agree", 2 is for "Agree", 3 is for "Neutral", 4 is for "Disagree", and 5 is for "Strongly Disagree."

C1 - For effective youth ministry in our congregation, the communication of God's Word with teenagers is a high priority.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C2 - For effective youth ministry in our congregation, awareness of today's youth culture from the local level is a high priority.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C3 - For effective youth ministry in our congregation, awareness of today's youth culture from the national level is a high priority.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C4 - For effective youth ministry in our congregation, connecting with today's youth culture and leading teenagers to view these through a biblical lens is a high priority.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C5 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity understand themselves in relationship to the lordship of Christ.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C6 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity live in relationship to the lordship of Christ.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C7 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity understand themselves as citizens of Christ's Kingdom.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C8 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity live as citizens of Christ's Kingdom.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C9 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity understand themselves as God's workmanship in this world.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

...

C10 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity live as God's workmanship in this world.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C11 - My approach to youth ministry includes communicating God's Word with teenagers in my setting.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C12 - My approach to youth ministry includes connecting with teenagers in a relational way within my setting.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C13 - My approach to youth ministry includes engaging with today's youth culture for the sake of teenagers in my setting.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C14 - Cultural engagement of today's youth culture from a biblical perspective is an important factor in effective youth ministry.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C15 - Cultural engagement of today's youth culture from a biblical perspective is a high priority in our congregational setting.

1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

1	2	3	4	5
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## YOUR EVALUATION

The following questions explore your evaluation of the tool for cultural engagement.

D1 - What are the strongest pieces of this tool? (Select up to 3)

- ☐ To name the cultural statement to be examined (identification)
- ☐ To consider how cultural texts influence teenagers (feel, think, do)
- ☐ To examine the results of the cultural stories (belief)
- ☐ To examine the guidance from Scripture on cultural stories (creation, fall, redemption, restoration)
- ☐ To consider how Scripture links to these influences (biblical discernment)
- ☐ To name the biblical statement which responds to the cultural text (condensing to a reply)
- ☐ To explore the biblical applications (alien, ambassador, artist)

D2 - Which of the following roles and relationships may benefit from this tool? (Select all that apply) \*

- ☐ Volunteer youth leader
- ☐ Paid youth leader
- ☐ Parents of teenagers
- ☐ Pastor
- ☐ Teacher (Sunday School, Confirmation, etc.)
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

D3 - What is your primary suggestion for sharpening this tool?

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

D4 - Preferred Email and Phone Number

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

D5 - Name for Gift Card Eligibility & for the Survey Integrity

Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you so much for your time! If you are interested in the final results of this project, which will be available in early 2020, please contact Jason Holt at [jasonholt@aflc.org](mailto:jasonholt@aflc.org).**

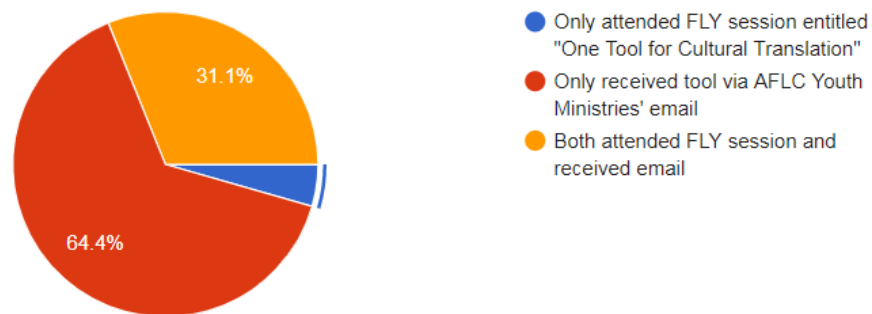
## APPENDIX E

### POST-TOOL SURVEY RESULTS

#### YOUR CONTEXT

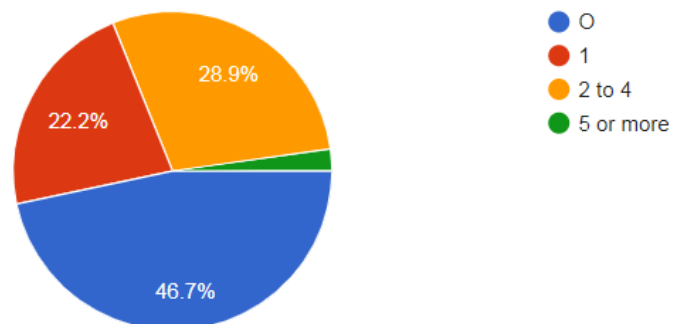
A1 - Which of the following best describes your situation in relationship to the translation tool?

45 responses



A2 - In how many instances since July did this tool influence your conversations with teenagers?

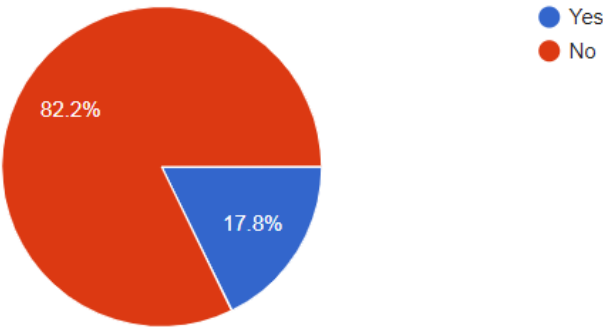
45 responses





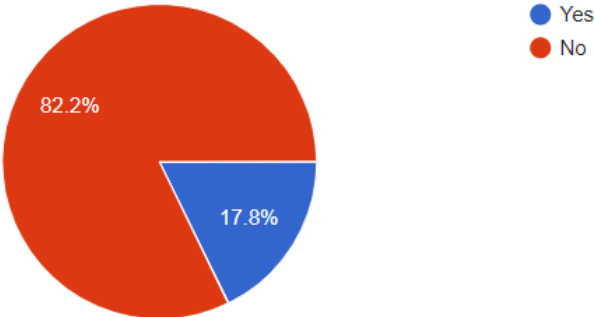
A3 - Did you elect to specifically utilize this tool in a teaching setting with teenagers?

45 responses



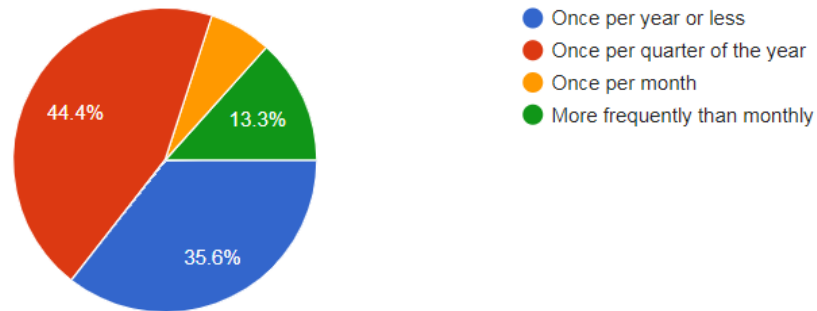
A4 - Did you elect to specifically utilize this tool with parents of teenagers in teaching or conversations with them?

45 responses



## A5 - How frequently could you see yourself utilizing this tool for youth ministry efforts in the future?

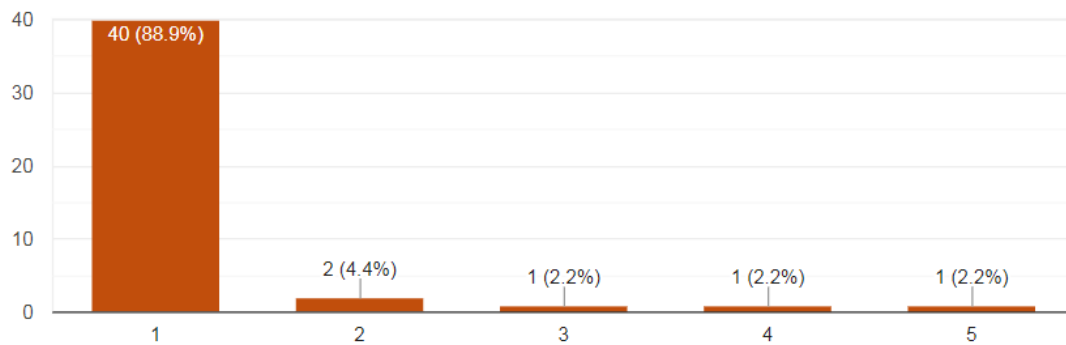
45 responses



## YOUTH CULTURE

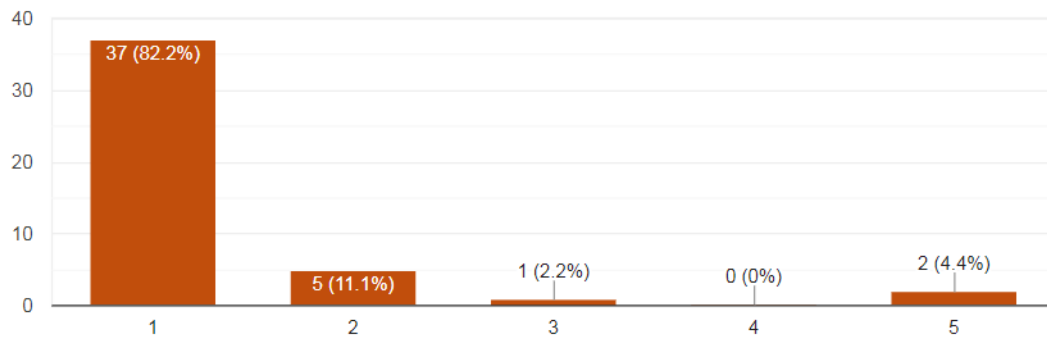
## B1 - God's Word is instructive to speak truth to today's youth culture.

45 responses



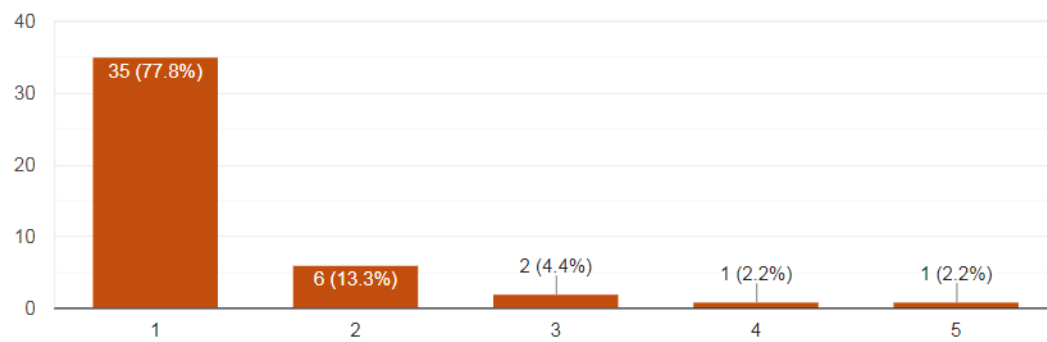
**B2 - God's Word is corrective to address errors in today's youth culture.**

45 responses



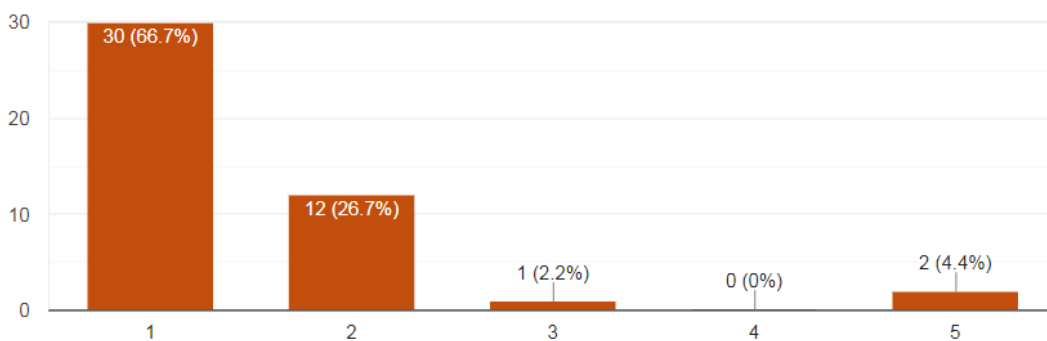
**B3 - God's Word is directive to Christ's mission engaging within today's youth culture.**

45 responses



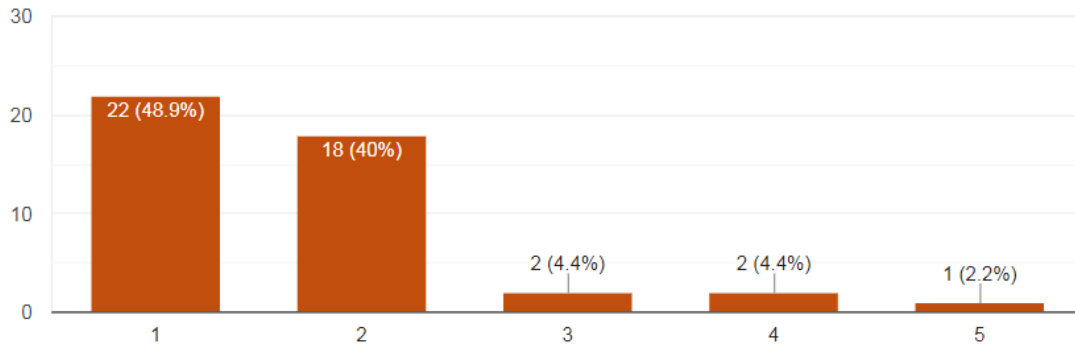
**B4 - I can see the influence of today's youth culture on the lives of the teenagers that we seek to minister to and with as a congregation**

45 responses



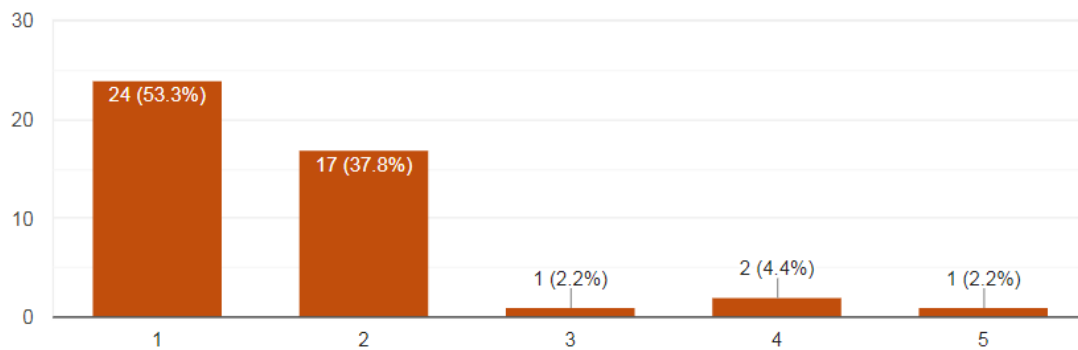
**B5 - I understand that specific beliefs witnessed among teenagers in my setting are a result of today's youth culture.**

45 responses



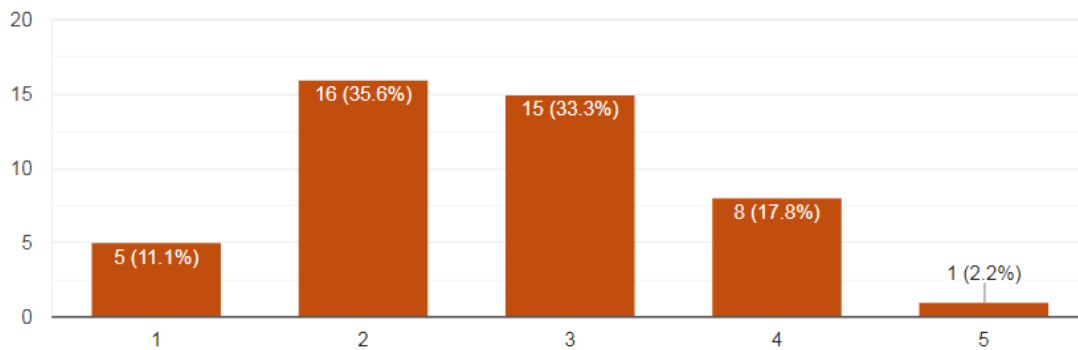
**B6 - I understand that specific behaviors observed among teenagers in my setting are a result of today's youth culture.**

45 responses



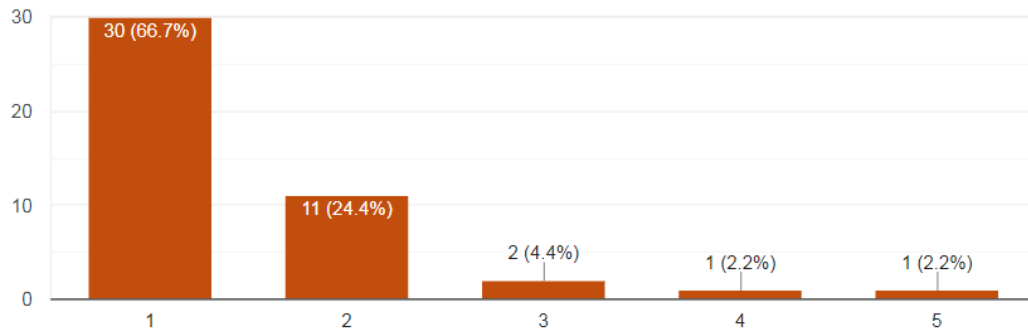
**B7 - I would expect that attitudes of the teenagers that I work with would improve if they were removed from today's youth culture.**

45 responses



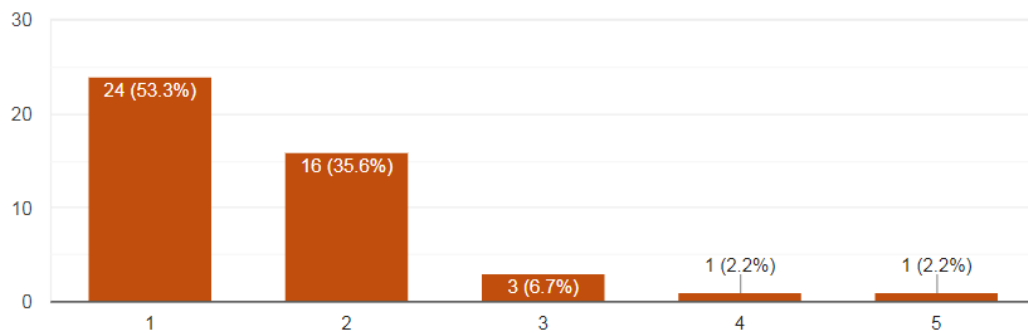
B8 - I would expect that actions of the teenagers that I work with would improve if they better understood the need to see their identity in Christ in the midst of today's youth culture.

45 responses



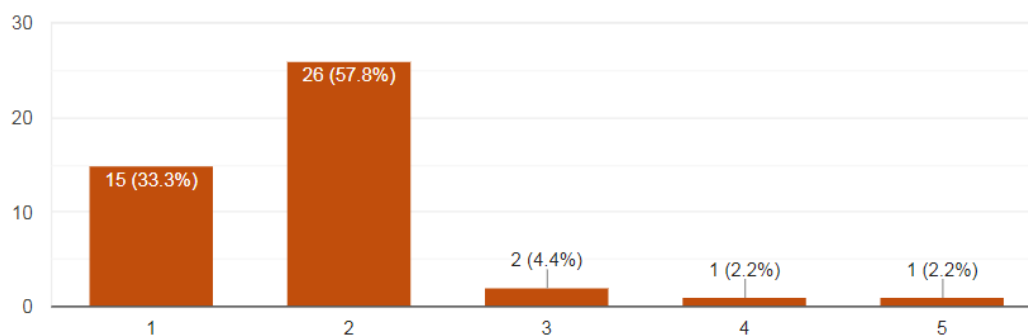
B9 - I would expect that aspirations of the teenagers that I work with would improve if they engaged to contribute in a Christian way within today's youth culture.

45 responses



B10 - I would expect that if a teenager brought an aspect of today's youth culture to me that I would be equipped to build a bridge to God's Word from the cultural question.

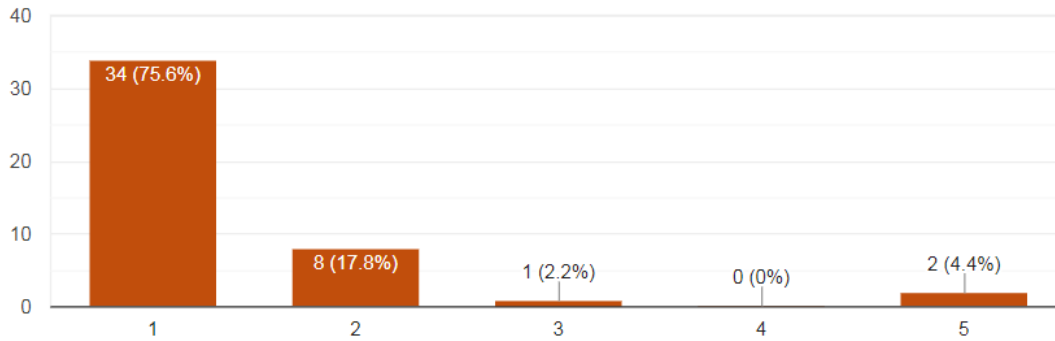
45 responses



## YOUTH MINISTRY

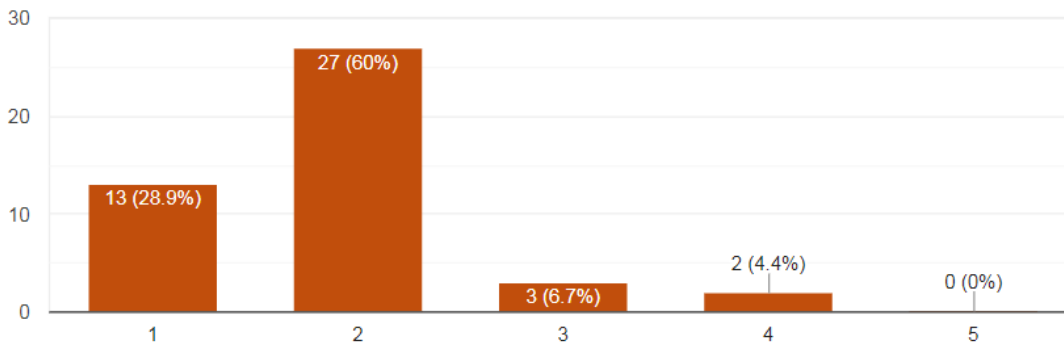
**C1 - For effective youth ministry in our congregation, the communication of God's Word with teenagers is a high priority.**

45 responses



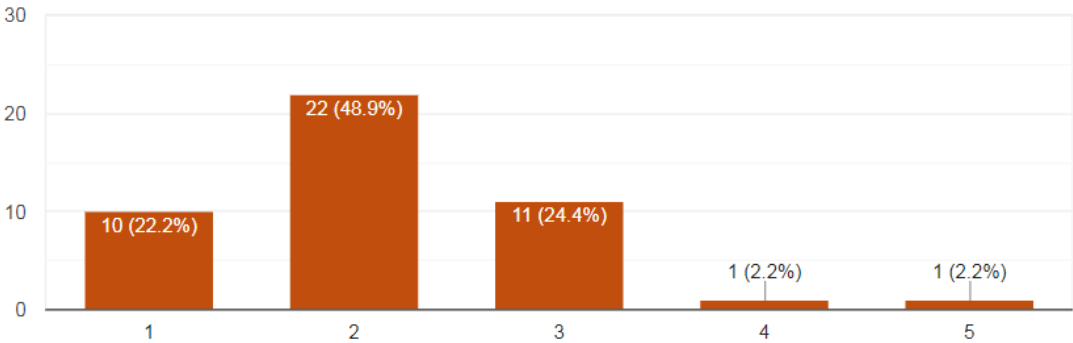
**C2 - For effective youth ministry in our congregation, awareness of today's youth culture from the local level is a high priority.**

45 responses



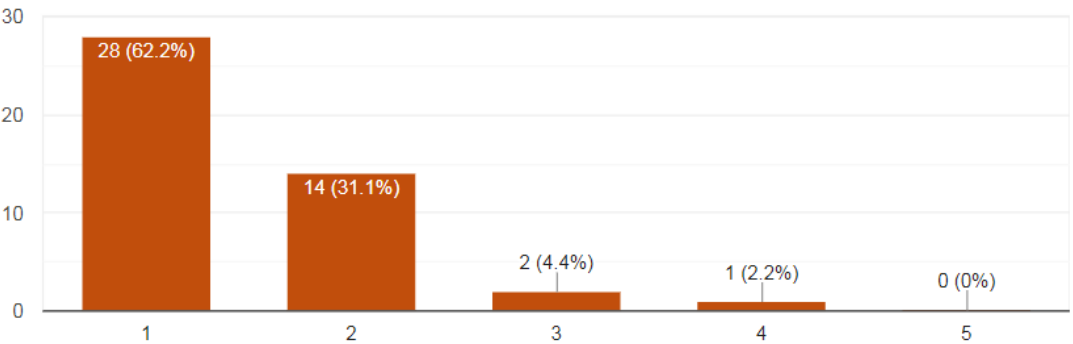
C3 - For effective youth ministry in our congregation, awareness of today's youth culture from the national level is a high priority.

45 responses



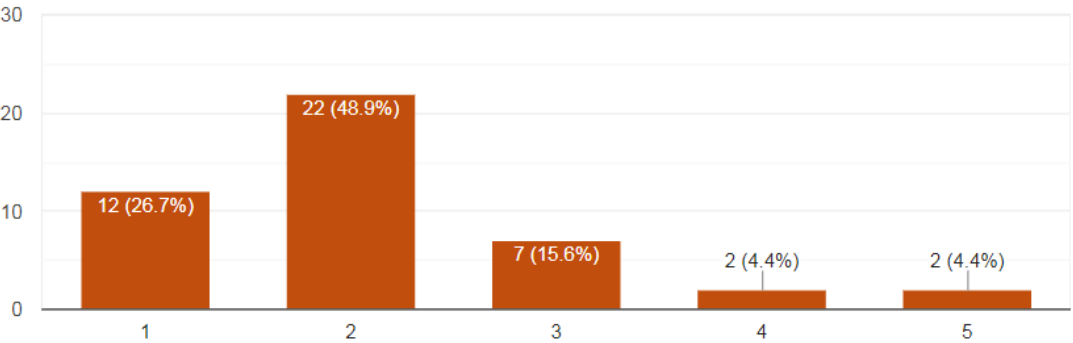
C4 - For effective youth ministry in our congregation, connecting with today's youth culture and leading teenagers to view these through a biblical lens is a high priority.

45 responses



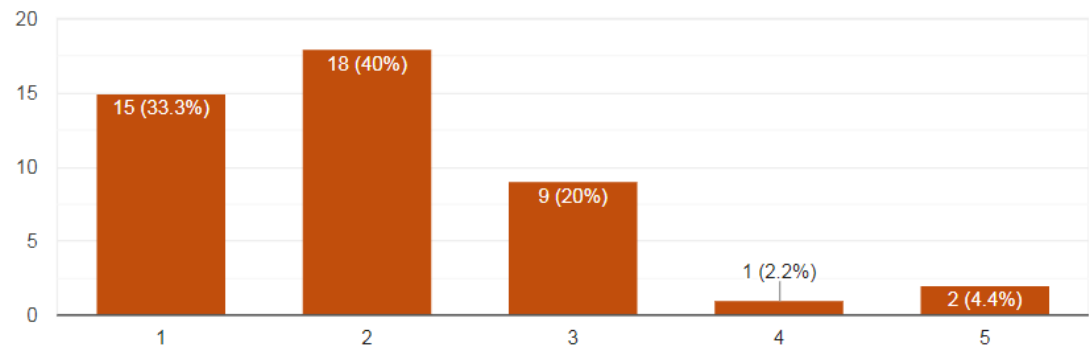
C5 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity understand themselves in relationship to the lordship of Christ.

45 responses



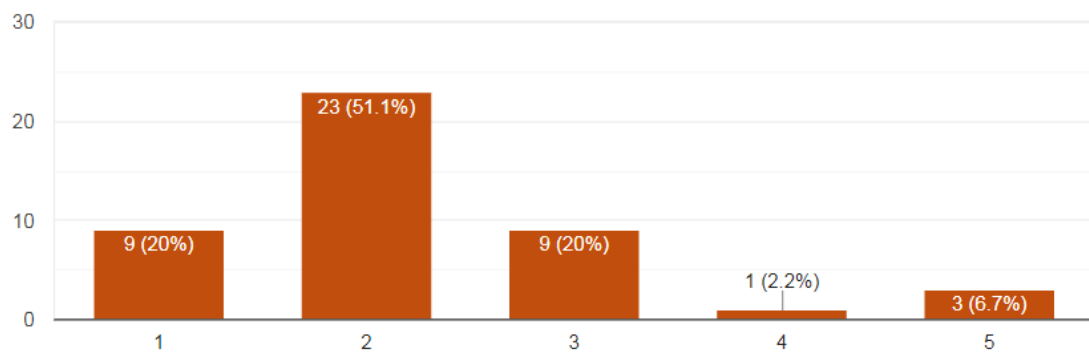
C6 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity live in relationship to the lordship of Christ.

45 responses



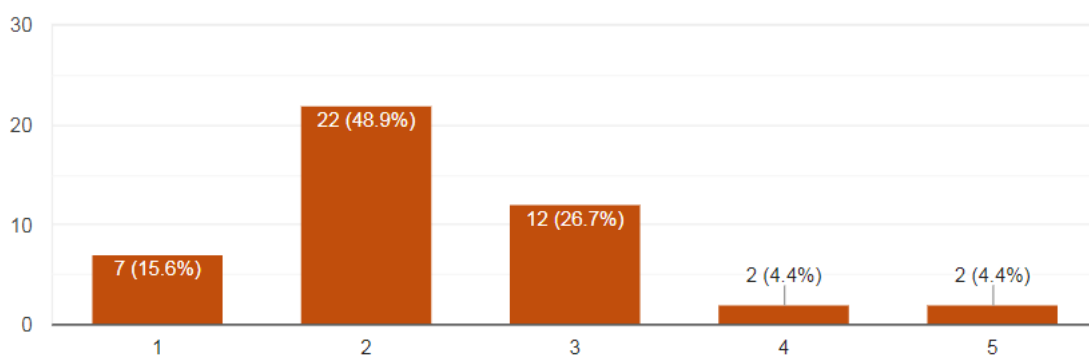
C7 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity understand themselves as citizens of Christ's Kingdom.

45 responses



C8 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity live as citizens of Christ's Kingdom.

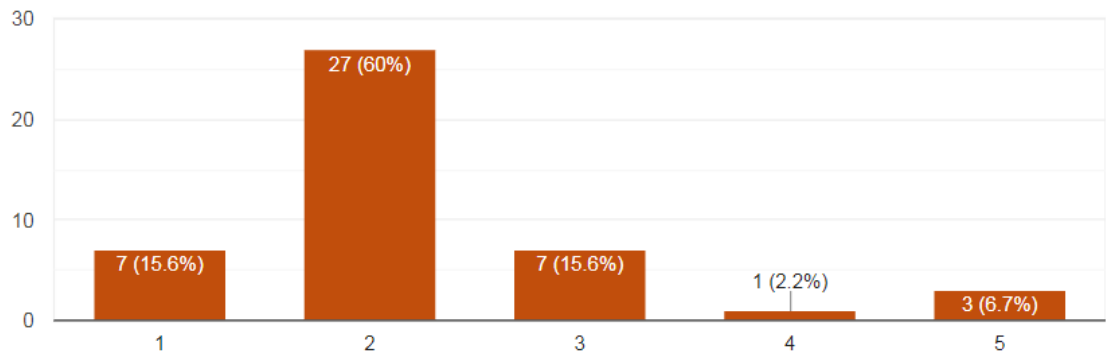
45 responses





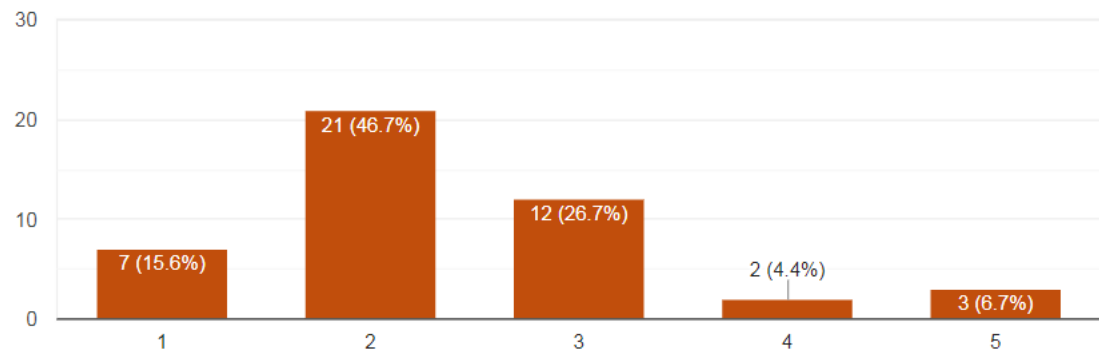
C9 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity understand themselves as God's workmanship in this world.

45 responses



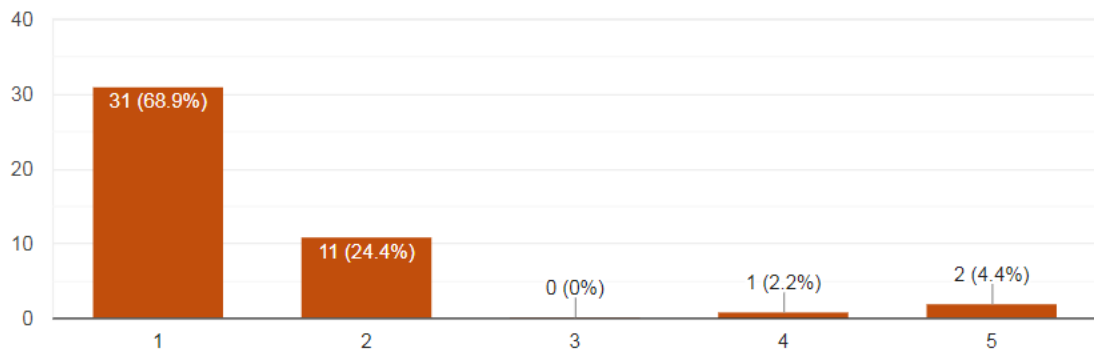
C10 - Teenagers in our congregation that are growing into spiritual maturity live as God's workmanship in this world.

45 responses



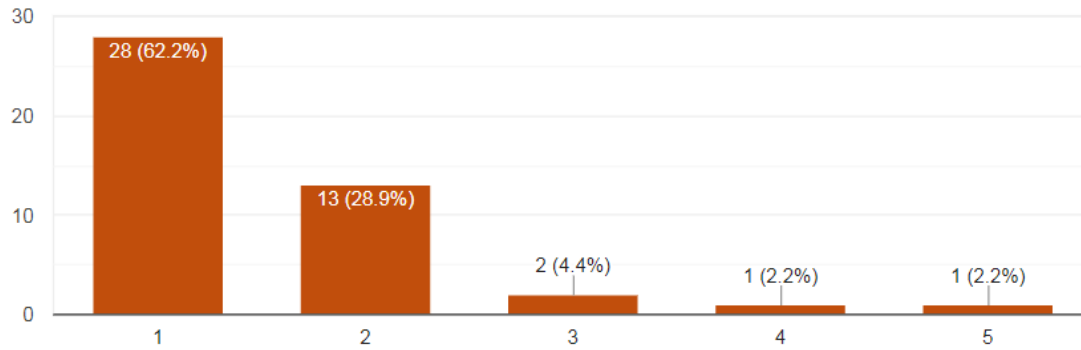
C11 - My approach to youth ministry includes communicating God's Word with teenagers in my setting.

45 responses



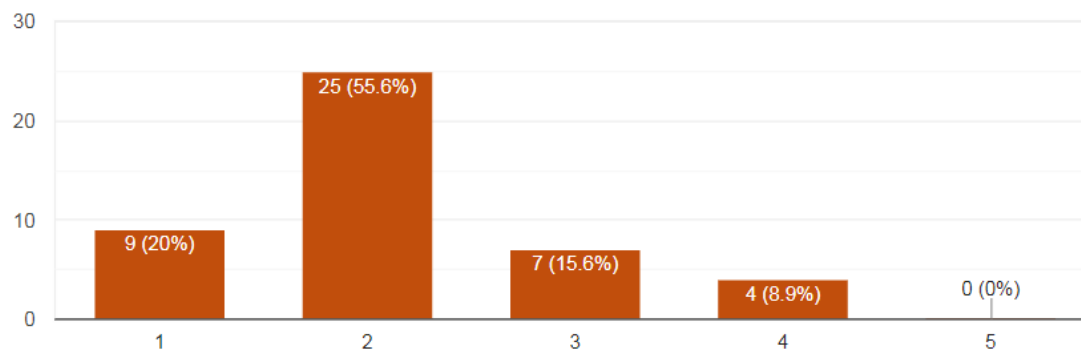
C12 - My approach to youth ministry includes connecting with teenagers in a relational way within my setting.

45 responses



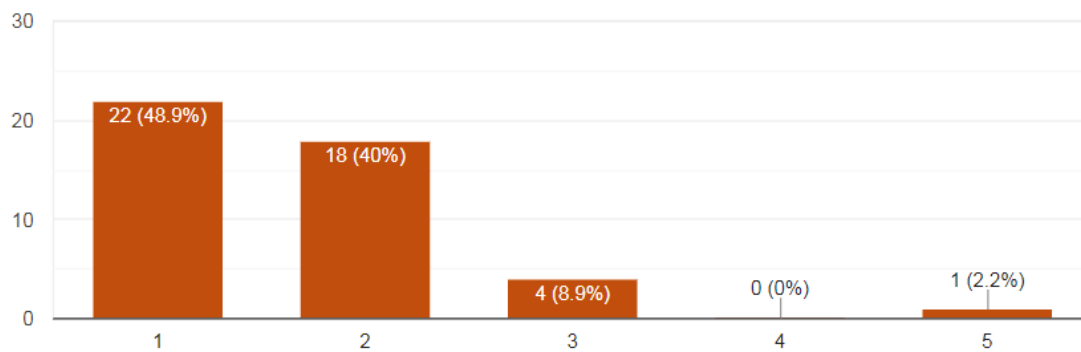
C13 - My approach to youth ministry includes engaging with today's youth culture for the sake of teenagers in my setting.

45 responses



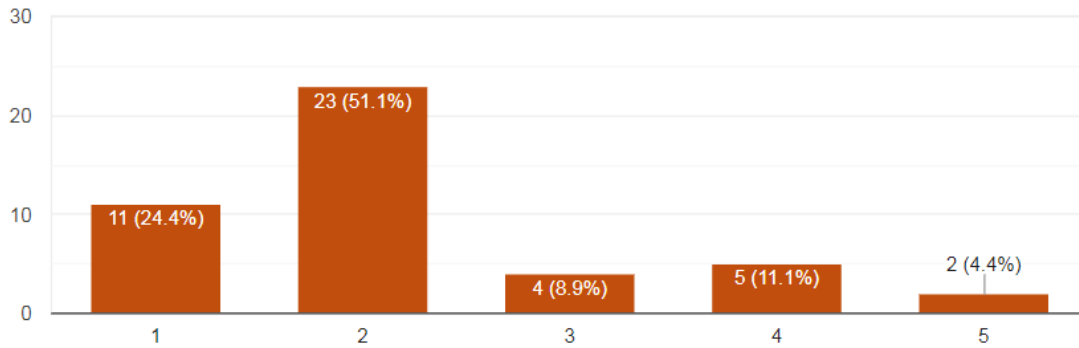
C14 - Cultural engagement of today's youth culture from a biblical perspective is an important factor in effective youth ministry.

45 responses



### C15 - Cultural engagement of today's youth culture from a biblical perspective is a high priority in our congregational setting.

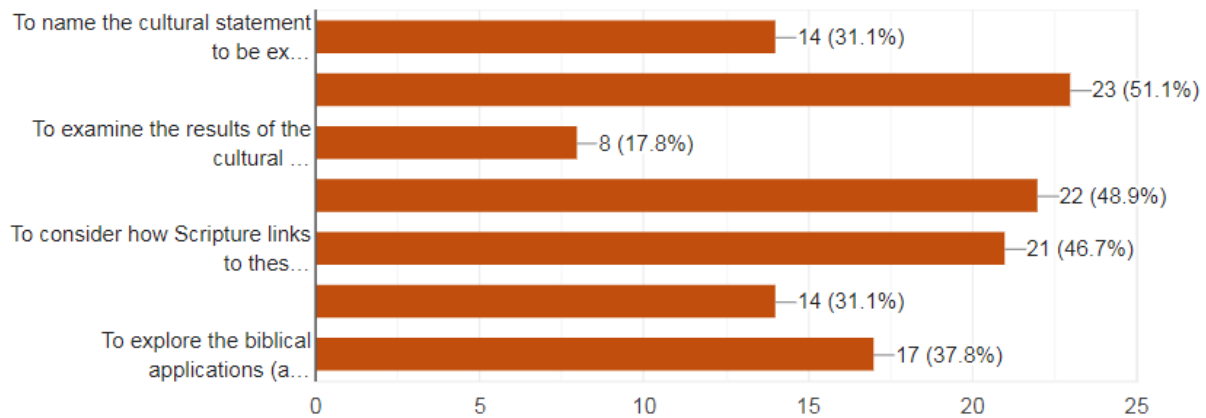
45 responses



#### YOUR EVALUATION

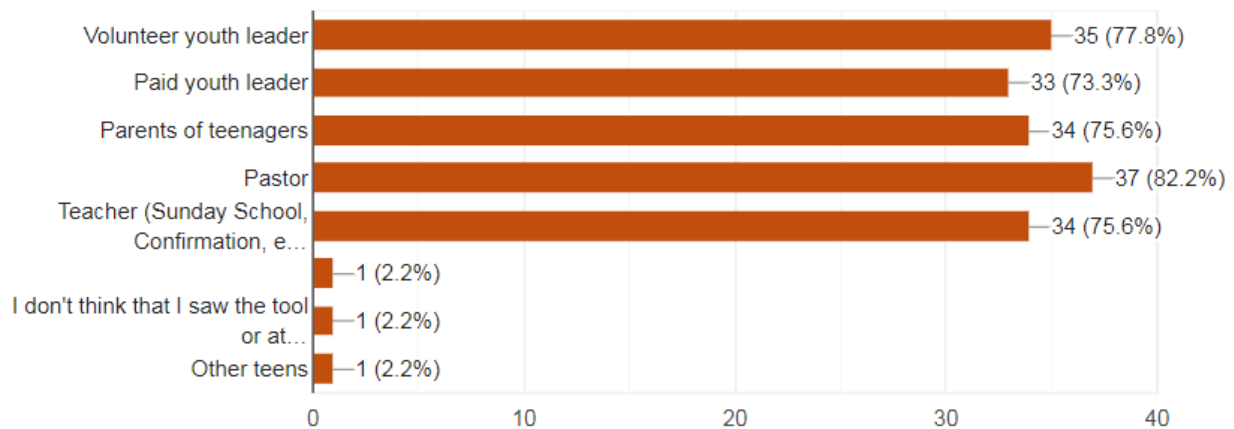
### D1 - What are the strongest pieces of this tool? (Select up to 3)

45 responses



## D2 - Which of the following roles and relationships may benefit from this tool? (Select all that apply)

45 responses



## D3 - What is your primary suggestion for sharpening this tool?

24 responses

I think this tool needs instructions on how it is to be used. Perhaps a concrete example could be given on how to take A Story in the Culture and run it through the tool. I am encouraged by it and I think it will be helpful, but as it is I personally find it hard to access and hard to use since it uses abstract terms.

Changing colors and some of the design layout

Address each group listed above and suggest specific instruction that apply to each group

Perhaps offer a couple of cultural proverbs as examples for people to run through at the beginning of the use of this tool.

none

Right now I think it needs some time to be used and evaluated in an ongoing process before changes are made.

I don't have a suggestion.

To be in closer contact with the teens and their interests.

I would consider condensing it down to the identification, belief and biblical answer that responds to it. 1 page simplified version

The language is a bit esoteric; simplify the language

Explaining it or showing it. How can it be helpful?

I don't have any suggestions.

Parents have the biggest impact on their kids. This tool can be helpful to them.

Definition of terms, ie. the tool, what is a Christian Cultural value, vs. societal value

It needs more instruction. Got confused on the second page in regard to how to use it.

Meet the youth where they are and show them Love, Respect and Compassion. Actively Listen to them and Respond to questions, concerns and thoughts with Biblical examples/proofs.

I would probably find some way to, at least on a basic level, add a few more mnemonic or other word assists to the tool, that show how the process of the tool works, or guides the user of the tool a bit more in using it. It presents a very good interpretive scheme overall!

I would create one that is worded simply- that can be read and understood by youth as well as teachers.

My only concern with this tool would be someone being intimidated at first glance. If it isn't really intuitive, they may start it but not get all the way through. As it is, I could make my way through it, but I would tend to move to something a bit simpler with less parts. I would also wonder how I would present this to a group in a convenient and interactive way which probably can be done somehow with the magic of technology, but I am not at that level of expertise.

Future training on how to explore the Biblical applications in a deeper and more meaningful manner

Give an example of a cultural statement and how to work through it using the tool.

Develop relationships with each student

I haven't had the chance to use it yet, for that I apologize, I'm looking forward to using it sometime this fall!

make it look prettier

## D4 - Preferred Email and Phone Number

45 responses

## D5 - Name for Gift Card Eligibility & for the Survey Integrity

45 responses

APPENDIX F  
SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

**Name:** Tim Allen  
**State:** Washington  
**Date:** 10/12/2019

**Introductory Comments:**

Greeting on Phone Call

Permission: By participating in this phone interview, are you granting that a brief summary your answers will be included in the Doctor of Ministry project being conducted, that your contributions will be listed in bulleted form in an Appendix, and that you are electing to freely participate in this way?

Answer: Yes.

**Interviewer Question # 1) In what way is this tool most helpful for youth leaders?**

Answer:

- Help youth leaders by processing the content
- First part of the tool in the “World” portion, it aids them to pick certain cultural stories and process them (Feel, Think, Hands, Believe) then to oppose that in relationship to the second portion.
- It enables them to compare and contrast the cultural worldview versus biblical worldview.
- A lot going on with the tool.
- My background is military – 26 years in active reserve and a police officer. I can see using the tool, but I’d prioritize the gist of takeaway from it.
- Wife saw the tool at FLY as valuable, but I was thinking about how I like the bottom line upfront.
- The layout is doctoral, which is not a negative thing. It’s not complex, but the thought process on paper is different than my thought process.

**Interview Question #2) In what way is this tool not addressing the needs of volunteer youth leaders with today’s youth culture?**

- This interview did not include this question, although it was provided in the email exchange.

**Interview Question #3) In your specific survey response, what alternative wording would you offer to “simplify” the terms for leaders and teens? Or how could the thought process on paper be different?**

Answer:

- For simplify wording, many times I went back to the heading “World to Word”. Probably clarifications in the presentation at FLY, but it is difficult stepping into the blank one. At FLY, I got to see examples. Your slides at FLY had specific examples and those were helpful. I want to find those examples, before I would use the tool again.
- For the thought process on paper, I know that I want to talk about something common to the issues for teens. Rather than me Googling it, I want to find examples to process through which leads to examining these from the Bible. I know that’s the intent, but I need actual examples.

More than Googling an answer, a tool with the actual example built into it.

**Interviewer Follow-Up Question: What wording would you change or what portions would you reduce on the page?**

Answer:

- I don’t know. Because the tool does not fit my thought process. I process information a little differently. I’m too objective. What is the end-state? What is the mission at the start?
- If I know the end goal, then I can better proceed. I’d look at the example to parallel to how I would answer the specific cultural story in front of me.

**Closing Comments: This feedback will be included as the project moves to completion with the target of May, 2020. Do you have any further questions or comments? Would you like to see the project in its final form?**

Answer:

- No, further comments.
- Yes, I would like to see the project in its final form and would consider sharing it with our (paid) Youth Director, Kaitlyn.

**Name:** Nick Stewart  
**State:** Wisconsin  
**Date:** 10/14/2019

### **Introductory Comments:**

Greeting on Phone Call

Permission: By participating in this phone interview, are you granting that a brief summary your answers will be included in the Doctor of Ministry project being conducted, that your contributions will be listed in bulleted form in an Appendix, and that you are electing to freely participate in this way?

Answer: Yes.

**Interviewer Question #1) In what way is this tool most helpful for youth leaders? In your survey, you indicated to consider how cultural texts influence teenagers, to examine the results of the cultural stories, and to examine the guidance from Scripture on cultural stories, does this still fit?**

Answer:

- I did not see the PDF. Would you be in a position to resend it? (Emailed the PDF to Nick.)
- I like visuals. I think the youth can also connect on a visual level. Valuable to see it.
- Kids sometimes read the Bible and do not see what it means. It makes the text more tangible.

**Interviewer Question #2) In what way is this tool not addressing the needs of volunteer youth leaders with today's youth culture? In your survey, there were "neutral" responses on the questions regarding lordship, citizenship, and workmanship, would definitions help here?**

Answer:

- For a volunteer, it would be nice if there was a training guide to go with it.
- Offering a gauge on potential answers to give youth leaders a sense of what responses could be.
- As a teacher, I get it 100%. Those not in education, the tool may be tricky to work through it.



- I like the idea of a full example filled out. Sample answers to get the feel to what to look for.
- In this way, it could enhance the conversation.

**Interviewer Question # 3) In your specific survey response, what leads you to mention teachers alongside of volunteer youth leaders for benefiting from the tool? Could you see other adults using it?**

Answer:

- Once again, I am a huge visual aid guy. You can tell a teen something, but will they get the idea.
- A Christmas Carol – I used a story map in class. Kind of similar to the questions of what it means.
- The goal of personalizing their learning.
- I don't see why parents or pastors wouldn't use it. Looking at things from the youths' perspective would be good for them.

**Closing Comments:** This feedback will be included as the project moves to completion with the target of May, 2020. Do you have any further questions or comments? Or would you like to see it in its final form?

Answer:

- No, I don't have any.

**Name:** Michelle Olson  
**State:** South Dakota  
**Date:** 10/16/2019

### **Introductory Comments:**

Greeting on Phone Call

Permission: By participating in this phone interview, are you granting that a brief summary your answers will be included in the Doctor of Ministry project being conducted, that your contributions will be listed in bulleted form in an Appendix, and that you are electing to freely participate in this way?

Answer: Yes, and they better because they are going to be good.

**Interviewer Question #1) In what way is this tool most helpful for youth leaders? In your survey, you indicated to consider how cultural texts influence teenagers (think, feel, do) was positive.**

Answer:

- It is useful to think through the heart, head, and hands – the whole person.
- From a generational perspective, I tend towards how a person thinks, but to address all three helps bridge generational gaps and the whole person.
- “Feelings” and “doing” is huge to this generation of teens, which can be a strength, but a previous generation may be stuck on “thinking.” Addressing all three all the way.

**Interviewer Question #2) In what way is this tool not addressing the needs of volunteer youth leaders with today’s youth culture? In your survey, you indicated an awareness and confidence about youth culture and addressing it.**

Answer:

- I don’t know if I have a good answer for this one. I feel like there exists a disconnect between how a volunteer youth leader does not think how important they are and that they are the adults there for teens. The teaching is expected to come from the one teaching leader, instead of realizing how impactful a volunteer youth leader can be in the life of a teenager.

**Interviewer Question #3) In your specific survey response, what leads you to mention teachers, but not volunteer youth leaders for benefiting from the tool?**

Answer:

- Especially teachers being intentional. Part of me thinks that it starts with teachers, which is for better or for worse. It shouldn't end there with the teachers, but it for sure starts there.

**Interviewer Follow-Up Question – what guidance could a tool like this give a volunteer youth leader to better see their impact?**

Answer:

- I don't know. This area is kind of off-topic, but youth ministry in some congregations, other volunteers understood the point was to work with teens. In other places, the adults see themselves as chaperones providing oversight. The congregational culture is significant to address that ministry is relationships and the oversight needed as adults in the room. Both types of congregations make a priority of teenagers, but how it looks in practice is different.

**Closing Comments:** This feedback will be included as the project moves to completion with the target of May, 2020. Do you have any further questions or comments? Or would you like to see it in its final form?

Answer:

- I'd love to see it at the end.
- I would say the more people understand the "think, feel, do" the better one's approach to people and the Scriptures will be.

**Name: Kurt Osweiler**  
**State: Minnesota**  
**Date: 10/18/2019**

### **Introductory Comments:**

Greeting on Phone Call

Permission: By participating in this phone interview, are you granting that a brief summary your answers will be included in the Doctor of Ministry project being conducted, that your contributions will be listed in bulleted form in an Appendix, and that you are electing to freely participate in this way?

Answer: Yes.

**Interviewer Question #1) In what way is this tool most helpful for youth leaders? In your survey, you indicated to consider how cultural texts influence teenagers (think, feel, do).**

Answer:

- Any tool that lays it out in a simple format is helpful.
- The flow chart style was good – giving a good guideline for the youth leader.
- It is not one “magic wand,” but it is a good tool to go forward on.

**Interviewer Question #2) In what way is this tool not addressing the needs of volunteer youth leaders with today’s youth culture? In your survey, you replied “strongly disagree” on the questions regarding cultural engagement with today’s youth – not an important factor and not a priority in your congregation.**

Answer:

- My capacity as a volunteer at church and as a full-time transportation coordinator for schools.
- Rose color glasses for adults – you have to live the youth culture where you are located.
- I was involved in youth ministry within Twin Cities, and here in rural northern Minnesota it is way different.
- Volunteer youth leader can have trouble identifying the youth culture and the church vs. non-church culture for the teens. Some teens 5-10 years ago would not know even the basic Bible stories, but today’s teens really do not know them.

- I guess for me, what I have been doing in northern Minnesota, is not looking at the culture, but just preaching the Word. If you take the culture as the fun layer of teenagers, then you can find the depth of the cultural needs.
- Our group of 10-12 teens on a Sunday night is focused on studying the Bible. No games.
- In a small town, with a strong sports-driven community, there is not really a place for games in a youth ministry setting.
- Trying to figure out the needs for the youth and trying to take on the hard stuff to prepare them for their life beyond.

**Interviewer Question #3) In your specific survey response, what leads you to mention parents of teens and teachers, but not volunteer youth leaders for benefiting from the tool?**

Answer:

- I have been giving a big push back in youth ministry to have parents involved.
- Teachers here could be in the church like Sunday School and in the community schools.
- The volunteer youth leader's challenge is they would not know what to do with the tool.
- Parents would have the home life to connect with the tool in their family setting.
- In my setting, teens are often surpassing the parents in spiritual wisdom.
- Parents are much more with their teens in a given week than the volunteer youth leader or other adults.

**Closing Comments:** This feedback will be included as the project moves to completion with the target of May, 2020. Do you have any further questions or comments? Or would you like to see it in its final form?

Answer:

- Not off the top of my head.
- Yeah! That would be fun to see!

**Name:** Rebecca Larson  
**State:** North Dakota  
**Date:** 10/18/2019

**Introductory Comments:**

Greeting in Person – we were able to hold the interview in Minneapolis, because of her travel.

Permission: By participating in this interview, are you granting that a brief summary your answers will be included in the Doctor of Ministry project being conducted, that your contributions will be listed in bulleted form in an Appendix, and that you are electing to freely participate in this way?

Answer: Yes.

**Interviewer Question #1) In what way is this tool most helpful for youth leaders? In your survey, you indicated to name the cultural text and to name the Biblical statement in response.**

Answer:

- If I remember right, my thought was that it is beneficial because if we are going to want to come as youth leaders from a biblical point of view, you cannot do that without a biblical context. Bringing the two together (cultural text and biblical statement) enables teens to see it more clearly. It enables us to come at the topic from a biblical view.

**Interviewer Question #2) In what way is this tool not addressing the needs of volunteer youth leaders with today's youth culture? In your survey, you replied "workmanship" was higher in their awareness than in their actions. Why do you suspect that is the case?**

Answer:

- I feel like in a way that this tool can only work so far. There is a point where it is up to the teens. As awesome as this tool is, it cannot automatically make them understand it and live it out. Teens are called by God and listening (to Him), living out this call of faith.

**Interviewer Question #3) In your specific survey response, what leads you to be neutral on the following statement? *"I would expect that actions of the teenagers that I work with would improve if they better understood the need to see their identity in Christ in the midst of today's youth culture."***

Answer:

- I feel like it is the same as my last answer. Perhaps it is something about the head knowledge of understanding, but even I as a volunteer youth leader may not react well to the truths shared. I know as an adult that certain types of food I will react poorly to, but that doesn't mean that I don't eat them sometimes.

**Follow-Up – What is the connection between hearing these truths from the Bible and living it out?**

Answer:

- We can't break it down and make it scientific. It comes down to God. We are workers, but it is His work. In the Old Testament, there were many messengers from God, but the people over and over were not hearing them. At some point, it is a spiritual battle between them and God.
- Maybe bringing them to God in prayer is the bigger priority, and not so much what we could teach.

**Closing Comments:** This feedback will be included as the project moves to completion with the target of May, 2020. Do you have any further questions or comments? Or would you like to see it in its final form?

- It is so easy for us in ministry to think this tool looks easy, but like a math problem, we might miss getting the answer. There are benefits to tools like this and a danger, that the adult that is using the tool may not know how to use it, which means teens may miss the point. The general lay person may get confused by it. Instruction from the leader on it will be most helpful.
- Yeah, it would be cool to see where you come out on that (the tool).

## APPENDIX G

### TOOL WITH ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONS

#### ONE TOOL FOR CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT: TRANSLATING FROM THE WORLD TO THE WORD

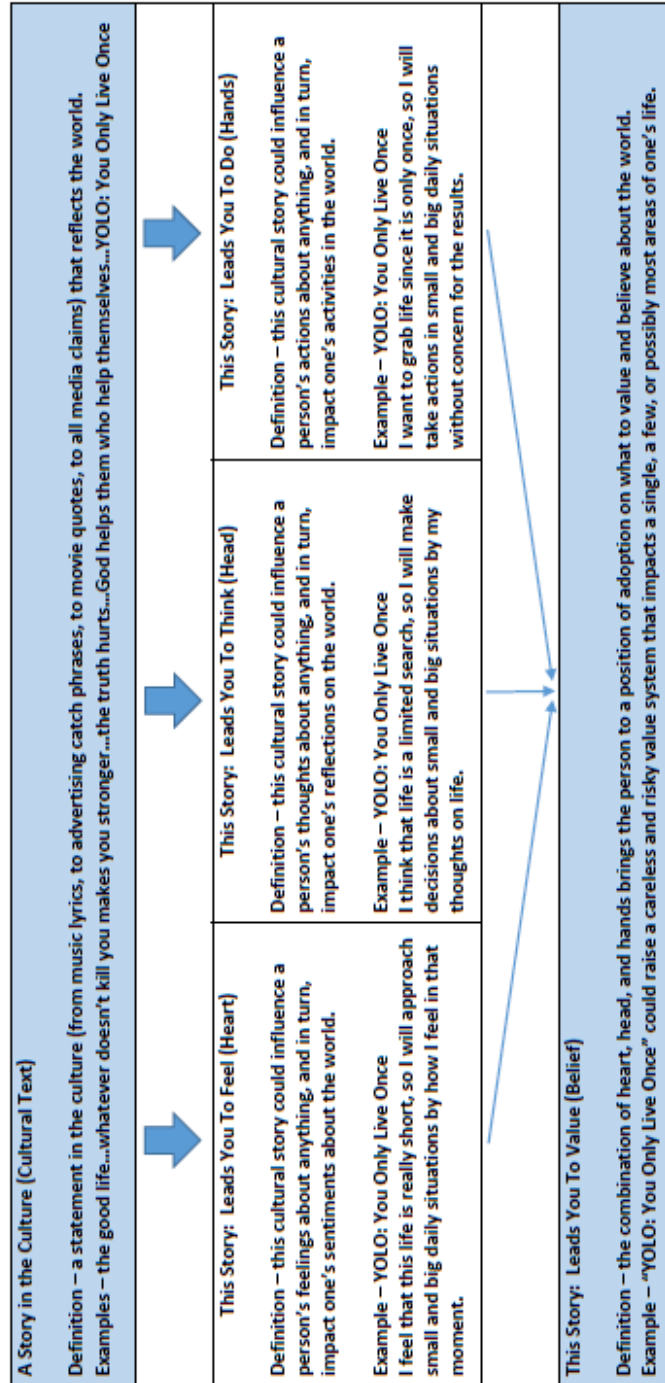
Rev. Jason R. Holt

#### *THE INTRO – How does this work?*

*"You have heard that it was said..."*

*Jesus in Matthew 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43*

#### THE WORLD





*"But I say to you..."*  
*Jesus in Matthew 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44*

### THE WORD

God's Story for This Culture: Creation – Genesis 1  God – Character & Activity Man – Image of God World – Made by the Lord	God's Story for This Culture: Fall – Genesis 3  Original Sin Actual Sin Sin's Consequences	God's Story for This Culture: Redemption – Luke 24  Christ as the Center of Scripture Christ Suffered, Died, and Risen Christ's Forgiveness and Hope	God's Story for This Culture: Restoration – Revelation 21  New Heaven & New Earth Dwelling Place of God with Men The Lord Makes All Things New
<p>God's Story for This Culture (A Response to the Cultural Text)</p> <p>Definition – the Scriptural accounts provide a lens to demonstrate the biblical guidance for the areas that the cultural text's claims impact.            Example – "YOLO: You Only Live Once" is contrasted by you have only one life to live, but it is a life redeemed by Christ and given to Christ's priorities.</p>			
<p>Believer as an Alien (I Peter 2:4-9)            -- How does this cultural story intersect with Christ's lordship for a believer?            Example – I will take risks in life, but they will submit to Jesus being my King.</p>	<p>Believer as an Ambassador (II Cor. 5:16-21)            -- How does this cultural story intersect with a believer's citizenship (also Phil 3:20-21)?            Example – I will take risks in my life on Earth, but they keep in view that heaven is my home.</p>	<p>Believer as an Artist (Ephesians 2:8-10)            -- How does this cultural story intersect with a believer's workmanship?            Example – I will take risks in my life, but they will contribute with the gifts/abilities Christ gave me.</p>	
<p>God's Story: A Believer's Calling (Applied to My Context)</p> <p>Definition – every Christian has the same calling to follow Jesus, but the unique gifts and burdens for each Christian leads this calling to be worked out in different ways. Believers' applications will incorporate one to three approaches based on the alien, ambassador, and artist appeals from Scripture.</p>			

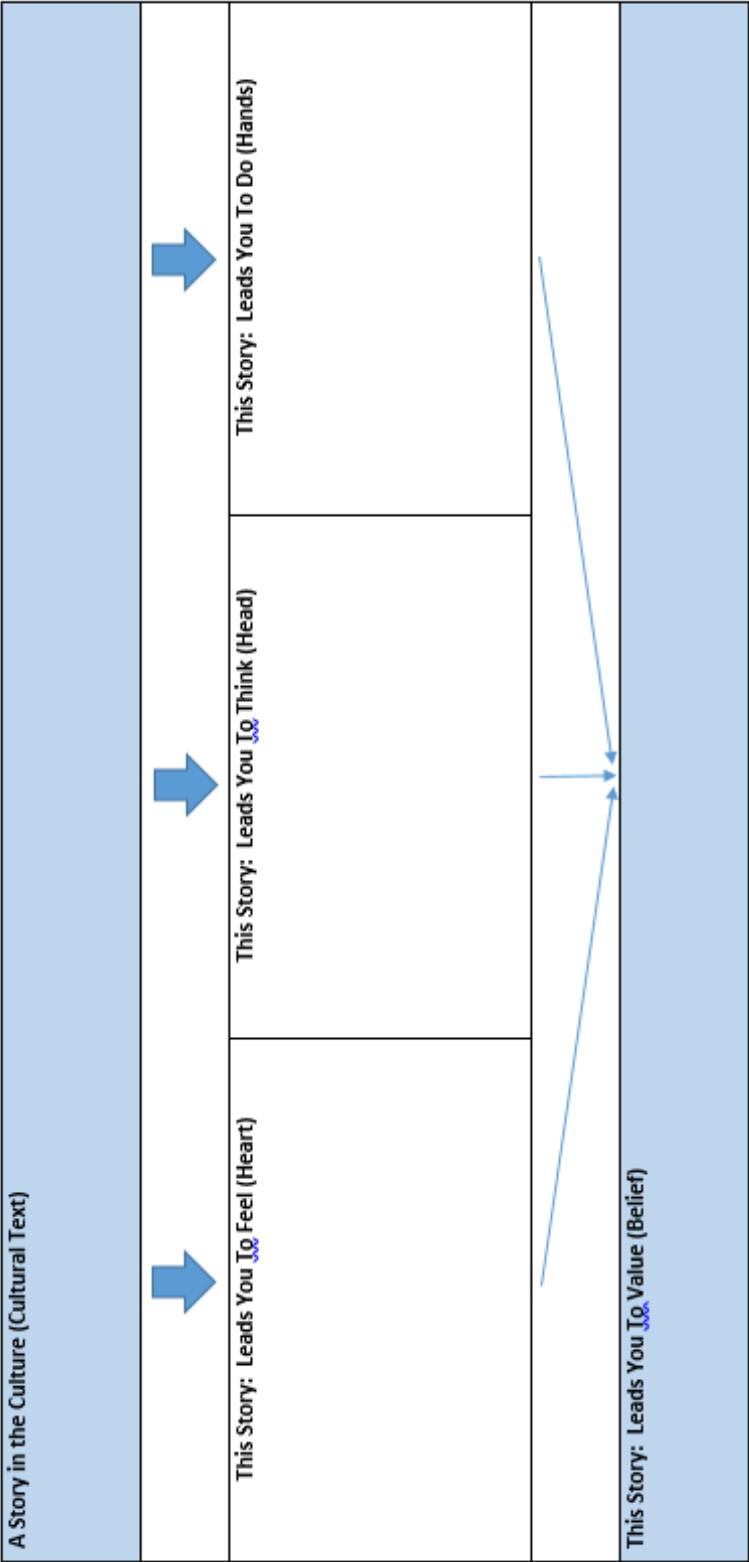
ONE TOOL FOR CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT:  
TRANSLATING FROM THE WORLD TO THE WORD

Rev. Jason R. Holt

THE ACTION – what do you want to explore?

*"You have heard that it was said..."  
Jesus in Matthew 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43*

THE WORLD



*"But I say to you..."*  
*Jesus in Matthew 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44*

### THE WORD

<p>God's Story for This Culture: Creation – Genesis 1</p> <p>God – Character &amp; Activity Man – Image of God World – Made by the Lord</p>	<p>God's Story for This Culture: Fall – Genesis 3</p> <p>Original Sin Actual Sin Sin's Consequences</p>	<p>God's Story for This Culture: Redemption – Luke 24</p> <p>Christ as the Center of Scripture Christ Suffered, Died, and Risen Christ's Forgiveness and Hope</p>	<p>God's Story for This Culture: Restoration – Revelation 21</p> <p>New Heaven &amp; New Earth Dwelling Place of God with Men The Lord Makes All Things New</p>
<p>God's Story for This Culture (A Response to the Cultural Text)</p>			
<p>Believer as an Alien (I Peter 2:4-9) -- How does this cultural story intersect with Christ's lordship for a believer?</p>	<p>Believer as an Ambassador (II Cor. 5:16-21) -- How does this cultural story intersect with a believer's citizenship (also Phil 3:20-21)?</p>	<p>Believer as an Artist (Ephesians 2:8-10) -- How does this cultural story intersect with a believer's workmanship?</p>	
<p>God's Story: A Believer's Calling (Applied to My Context)</p>			

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